DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 271 417 SP 027 515

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TITLE A (Philadelphia) Teacher's Journal.
INSTITUTION North Dakota Univ., Grand Forks. Center for Teaching and Learning.
PUB DATE Sep 85
NOTE 128p.
AVAILABLE FROM North Dakota Study Group, Box 8158, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND 58202 ($5.00).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; Elementary School Teachers; *Peer Relationship; Personal Narratives; Primary Education; Public Schools; *Teacher Administrator Relationship; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Student Relationship; *Teaching Experience

ABSTRACT

This journal of a first grade teacher is one of a continuing series of monographs initiated by the North Carolina Study Group on Evaluation. In addition to a narrative record of class discussions, the journal includes anecdotes, observations of children and their involvement in activities, interactions with parents both in and out of school, the teacher's plans, and descriptions of the pressures on public school teachers. Reflections are offered on the continuing education a teacher aquires through the daily involvement with children in the classroom and with peers and other school personnel. Detailed descriptions are provided of the physical environment of the classroom and the school, as well as of the activities of the students and lessons. (JD)

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In November 1972, educators from several parts of the United States met at the University of North Dakota to discuss some common concerns about the narrow accountability ethos that had begun to dominate schools and to share what many believed to be more sensible means of both documenting and assessing children's learning. Subsequent meetings, much sharing of evaluation information, and financial and moral support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund have all contributed to keeping together what is now called the North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation. A major goal of the Study Group, beyond support for individual participants and programs, is to provide materials for teachers, parents, school administrators and governmental decision-makers (within State Education Agencies and the U.S. Office of Education) that might encourage re-examination of a range of evaluation issues and perspectives about schools and schooling.

Towards this end, the Study Group has initiated a continuing series of monographs, of which this paper is one. Over time, the series will include material on, among other things, children's thinking, children's language, teacher support systems, inservice training, the school's relationship to the larger community. The intent is that these papers be taken not as final statements--a new ideology, but as working papers, written by people who are acting on, not just thinking about, these problems, whose implications need an active and considered response.

Vito Perrone, Dean
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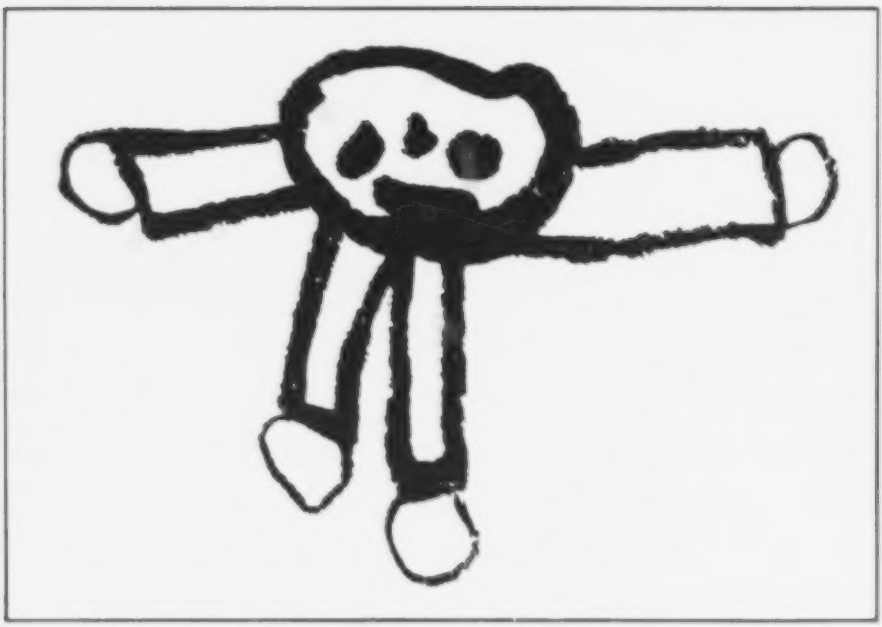

Lynne Strieb

A (PHILADELPHIA) TEACHER'S JOURNAL

Center for Teaching and Learning
University of North Dakota
Grand Forks, ND 58202
September 1985

Introduction

The entries which follow are a small portion of my school journal--the first year, 1980-81. I have kept a journal of my teaching since September 1980 when, at the suggestion of Patricia Carini, Director of the Prospect Center in North Bennington, Vermont, I decided to keep a narrative record of class discussions to augment the daily notes and records on individual children which I have kept since I began teaching 13 years ago. By November 1980, I realized how valuable the journal had become for my practice. The more I wrote, the more I observed in my classroom and the more I wanted to write. As I re-read my journal I got more ideas for teaching. I expanded the journal to include other aspects of teaching--anecdotes, observations of children and their involvement in activities, interactions with parents both in and out of school, my plans, descriptions of the pressures on public school teachers. I also wrote about my continuing education through my own reflections and the questions that emerged, through books, and through association with colleagues in the Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative and at the Prospect Summer Institutes.

During the year covered by these journal entries, my class of 33 first graders had 22 black children, nine white children, and two children who spoke only Spanish when the year started. About half the children in the class were there because their parents had requested it. Most of the rest were Title I children, receiving extra help from a teacher's assistant provided by the federal Title I program. The entire class stayed with me through second grade.

Although the streets in the Philadelphia neighborhood where I teach and live are tree-lined and there is grass everywhere, the schoolyard is littered with broken bottles and trash. The walls of the round, modern school building are covered with graffiti.

My classroom is the end room in a pod of four rooms. It has three walls so the children and I can, unfortunately, see and hear the activity in other rooms. The floors are carpeted and the walls are gray-green. Because the two tall and narrow jalousie windows are broken, covered, and cannot be opened, the room feels dark and close. The only light comes from fluorescent ceiling fixtures and plant lights.

My class library contains about 2,000 books--about 500 are nonfiction, including about 300 on science, and 150 on art and craft. About 650 of the fiction books are paperback and circulate in a class library the children run; these books may be taken home. I provide the children with a variety of art, math, construction, dramatic, and science materials and activities from which to choose at Project Time.

* * * *

If my journal appears to be divorced from the world outside the classroom, or to ignore the pressures which teachers currently face, it is not because I am unaware of either, or think they have no bearing on classroom life. It is rather because it was written before a long, bitter teachers' strike; before a media attack on Philadelphia teachers; before the big push to teach little children more *facts and skills* earlier and earlier; before the "Nation at Risk" report of the Commission on Excellence; before the effects of the Reagan cuts were felt in the classroom; before the standardized curriculum and increased testing. It was written when I could concentrate on the children and what and how I teach them. 1980 seems long ago and far away. I've continued journal-writing. I continue to raise questions about my teaching and, indeed, the outside world and current pressures are central to that writing.

Acknowledgements

Good teachers never get that way on their own. If I am a good teacher it is because of the influence of many other teachers. It is rare that one has the opportúnity to publicly thank them, and I feel that whenever possible, it is important to do so.

Peggy Perlmutter's voice, questions, and ideas have been central to my relationship with children, and she has served as a model of consistency of approach to teaching that is difficult to emulate. During our four-and-one-half year lunch-time association, Susan Shapiro, Virginia Bommentre, and the Rainbow Team--Kate Guerin, Rita Carney, Barbara Ruth, and Ned Carroll have taught me a great deal about working cooperatively and, more important, have helped me to find humor in even the most depressing and absurd moments of daily school life. My professional life and that of my dear friend Rhoda Kanevsky are so closely entwined that sometimes I can't tell which words are hers and which are mine; it is remarkable how much one can learn and accomplish over the telephone. The work of Vivian Schatz, Ernestine Rouse, Essie Borish, Lillian Barbour, and Marie Tervalon at the District Six Advisory Center, Lore and Don Rasmussen at the Durham Center in Philadelphia, and the Advisors from the EDC Infant School Model of Follow Through--Rosemary

Williams, Nancy Veree Sealey, Sam Cornish, and Claryce Evans--had a lasting effect on me. I learned much of what I know about beginning readers from the teachers and researchers who collaborated in the ETS Reading Study. I have noted some of Edith Klausner's and Lillian Weber's important influence in the body of my journal.

The late Marcus Foster, formerly Superintendent of Schools in Oakland, California, was my first Principal in 1962-63, when I was a long-term substitute at the Paul Lawrence Dunbar School. He saw past the mistakes of an untrained, brand-new teacher and urged me to stay in teaching. He taught me a great deal about poverty and dignity and about being black. It is rare in Philadelphia for a Principal to allow teachers to remain with their children for two years. I am grateful to my Principal, William Seiberlich, for his trust in me.

I have also been fortunate to have worked in a school which welcomes parents into the classroom. I have learned so much about children from them.

It was when I read Frances' Hawkins' *The Logic of Action* as a beginning teacher in 1971 that I realized how important it is for classroom teachers to write for each other. Her work, the writing in OUTLOOK, and the work of Herbert Kohl inspired me to try it myself. Central Park East School in New York City and its staff have been a model for me of what schools and teaching might be. Patricia Carini had the foresight to create a place, The Prospect Center and, especially, its Summer Institutes, where teachers could come together to share ideas, review their teaching, and feel renewed and ready to face another year. She has also helped many of us, through the seminars and reflective processes, to realize our own power and worth as teachers and persons.

My friends and colleagues in the Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative, too numerous to mention here, have filled my Thursday afternoons with intellectual stimulation, support, and joy. My husband Bert, who is a wonderful teacher, has had the patience of a saint and is deeply interested in learners of all ages. Leonard Belasco, Paula Paul, Beth Alberty, Patricia Carini, Carole Edelsky, Tony Kallet, Edith Klausner, Anne Martin, Lillian Weber, and Arthur Tobier read my journal and made valuable suggestions regarding its form and use. Portions of this journal appeared in the Winter 1984 issue of OUTLOOK.

My journal is dedicated to my children, Lee, Saul, and Max.

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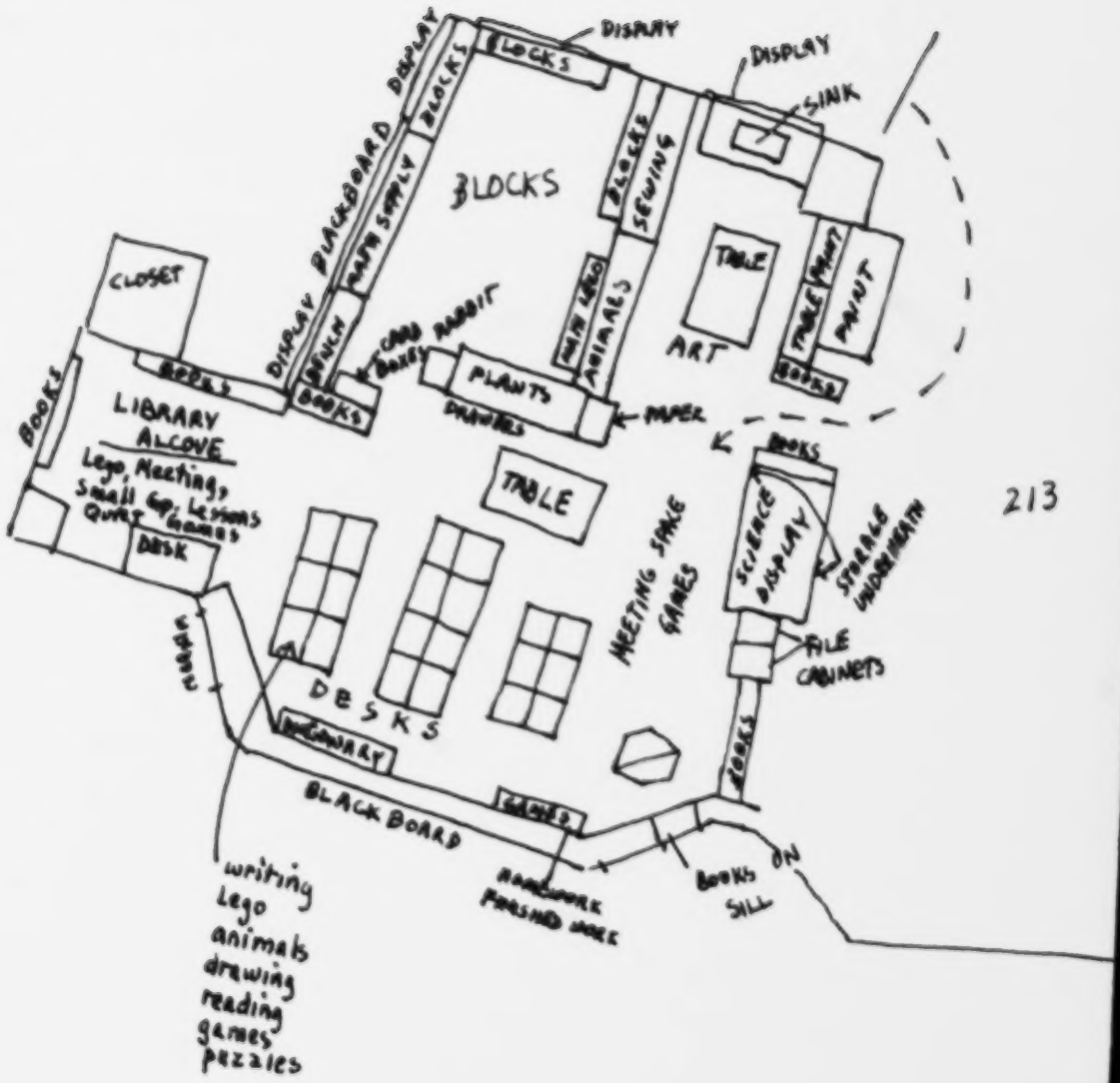

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A (Philadelphia) Teacher's Journal

September 23. What should you do when someone is talking to the group at class meeting? We had long discussion about behavior at meeting.

Say your first and last name. Many of the children also said their middle names. I said my whole name.

We've just finished a teachers' strike and were given no preparation time before this first full day of school. Usually we have two days. The room is bare. I asked the children to look around the room. "What do you see?" They said they saw lots of green and blue (rugs and walls) and flowers on the table. This led to a discussion of what's missing from the room. The children felt that toys, books, pencils, and animals were missing. I said that we need lots of children's drawings and paintings.

I showed the children how to use their drawing-writing books at writing time. I asked them not to bend the hard cardboard backs; to put the stapled side where their left hands are (sitting across from each other confused them); and to draw only one picture in the book per day.

The children love stories and listen so well.

September 24. I brought a cornstalk back from the country and asked the children to describe it: *Green, yellow, white around the cob, dirt on the bottom, weeds on top, like sugar cane.*

They counted the leaves and named it corn. I asked them to talk about the bottom and to tell about the roots. I held the corn stalk erect next to one of the children. "Which is smaller, Leonard* or the cornstalk? Which is taller?"

We peeled the husk from the cob and talked about the silk. The kids called it hair. I called the corn horse or feed corn. Reggie said we could eat it if we would cook it. Foster told us of his memories of eating, growing, and feeding corn to the pigs on his grandmother's farm down south. I asked the kids to guess how many kernels of corn were on the cob. The guesses ranged from 30 to 1100. Most of the guesses were around 100. Friday we will take the kernels from the husk and count them.

I showed the *Big/Real Books* and *Wonder Books* to the children. The children from Susan Shapiro's class (K-6) recognized some of the books from last year and talked

*Children's names have been changed.

This is an edited version of a longer, ongoing journal.

excitedly about which they wanted to read. The discussion became an English-Spanish lesson. Enrico supplied the Spanish words and I, then the children, repeated them. (Enrico was born in Panama and he speaks no English.) Then I gave him the English words and he had to repeat them.

Many children imitated Spanish in a "nonsense language" though not to make fun. (I remember doing the same as a child and thinking that I was really speaking in a language that *someone* would understand. I would just have to meet the person.) The children asked me to read one of the books. There was no time before lunch.

I talked about the condition of the room because our carpeted floor had just been swept. Each day we will pick up the little pieces of paper. The children checked inside the desks as they cleaned and found crayons in them.

We counted the pencils. There were thirty-two. I asked how many tens there were and how many ones were left over. Robbie, Reggie, Jimmy, Ben, and Belinda (probably a few others) guessed three tens and two. Reggie translated it into money--three dimes and two nickels.

Belinda remarked that we had five meetings today, indicating by her tone of voice that five may have been a few too many.

There were lots of routines--putting clothes away, pushing chairs in, finding places in line. We were late for lunch and dismissal. I'm not yelling. I'm just going slowly.

September 25. Ms. Rose, Jane's mother, brought in a sunflower from the garden they planted at her house last spring when they were in kindergarten. She reminded the children of all the things they had planted. She brought the flower in a paper bag and the children had to guess what it was in 20 questions or less.

I showed the children how to use the picture dictionary.

September 26. The children sorted the corn kernels into piles of 10 during Project Time. We counted by tens. There were 510 kernels on the cob.

We played the game Guess My Number. I asked the children to guess a number of which I was thinking between zero and 10. Then I asked the children what the word *equal* means. Henry kept saying it means *answer* as in 2 + 3 = 5.

I spent lots of time on routines.

September 29. I asked the children to guess how many seeds were in the sunflower from our garden. After they guessed, we put them into piles of 100, ten at a time.

I started to read *Little House in the Big Woods*. I asked questions about logs, smokehouses, pork butchering, the season.

I asked the children if any of them had seen any insects outside. Felicia had brought one into school and I showed it around, explaining that her grub has to be either left outside or placed in the refrigerator for the winter. The children began to talk of the times they had seen snakes. (Are they confusing snakes with worms?)

September 30. I did a handwriting lesson on writing circles and lines.

Since this was the last day of September, I talked to the children as I changed the numbers and month on the calendar. I asked, "What does the calendar tell you? How many days are in September?"

I told them that each month we will have a birthday party for the children who are born in that month. Since this is the last day in September we will have our September birthday party. When we eat together in the classroom we sing the song Peg Perlmutter taught us when my own children were in her nursery classroom: "Oh how very nice it is to sit and eat with friends."

October 1. At the beginning of the year I hold two Parents' Meetings--one during the day in school and one at night at a parent's home. Here are some of the questions parents raised: What famous Americans do you teach about? (I asked for suggestions.) What's the daily schedule? What happens if some kids influence others badly? What values do you teach? (No hitting, use words, do not destroy the work of others, listen when someone else talks.) What do you do about proper grammar? What are the scores of the California Achievement Test used for?

When I notice that some children are learning to read more quickly than others I say to the whole class, "Some people learn to read when they are two, others don't learn until they are 10. But almost everyone learns to read. Everyone in this room is learning to read. It might just take some people a little longer to learn than others."

October 8. There doesn't seem to be a lot of time to have discussions with the children. So many of them bring things for the Paper Bag Guessing Game that all our meeting time is used up by playing it.

I've done handwriting lessons (Oo, Ii, Nn, Aa) and math workbook lessons (describe two pictures in the workbook).

We talked about what the children should do after finishing with their drawing-writing book: "What should you do instead of running around the room?"

October 14. Today I asked the children if anyone could make up a good Halloween story. Jane started with one and Shane, Tami (she is *so* quiet that her raising her hand surprised me), and Atiya followed. Many other kids

raised their hands for a turn. At Project Time, which immediately followed the discussion, many children drew Halloween pictures and then dictated the stories to me. The stories were quite varied. It really does help to have the kids talk before they dictate stories. After Project Time I read the stories to the class. They were very quiet as I read.

Handwriting: T, I, 2.

October 15. There doesn't seem to be time for discussions.

Handwriting: 3, F, E.

October 16. I put peanuts in a bag for the Paper Bag Guessing Game.

We talked about *Little House in the Big Woods*. I'm thinking about reading the whole book now and then rereading parts during the seasons and holidays.

I did a lesson on equivalence, more, and less with Unifix cubes (interlocking plastic cubes about an inch on a side).

Handwriting: 2, 3, t.

October 17. I said, "I've noticed that lots of things in the room have changed. Can you see anything that has changed?" *The baby mice used to be pink and now they are black and brown....The praying mantis died....The plants are growing....There are more toys, books, games....Some of us are reading....Pam's tomato went from green to orange to red. Now it's drippy.*

Before we went outside for the children to play on the climber, I asked the children how they should behave. I asked them to be careful that people are out of the way when they jump or slide. "And if you don't come when I call you to go inside, you'll have to stay in the next time we go out."

October 20. I brought a large, heart-shaped leaf to school and challenged the children to find a larger one. They didn't understand what *challenge* meant. Many of the very capable children were worried that it meant something serious or something they could not do. I explained that it was like a contest.

Then I used Unifix cubes to measure the length of the leaf from the tip to the bottom and recorded how many cubes it took. Leonard suggested that I measure the length from the tip to the beginning of the stem. I did.

Finally, I traced the perimeter of the leaf (using that term, *perimeter*) and put the drawing on the bulletin board with the words "CHALLENGE: Can you find a larger leaf than this?" I purposely did not specify larger in perimeter, area, length, etc. We'll see what they find.

We played an attribute game using my feather collection. I gave a feather to each child. Then each

child put the feather on the floor in the center of the circle, one at a time. They tried to match it with others that were similar. When everyone finished, we talked about the different sets and described them. I asked if anyone wanted to make any changes, and why. I need a rope loop to put around the set under discussion to distinguish it from the other sets.

Handwriting: M, m, 4.

I showed the class examples of patterns of Unifix cubes and the sets of buttons that they sorted. I asked them to draw the patterns and sets and then I showed the drawings at meeting.

October 22. Today Felicia answered the challenge by bringing in an *enormous* leaf. We spent a long time talking about it. I got my leaf, which had dried and shrunk, and asked the children what they thought had happened to it. They talked about leaves drying in the fall and about how this happens when leaves get old. A few thought the leaf needed water. We'll watch what happens to the huge leaf, whose stem is now in water.

We talked about which leaf was bigger. After measuring the length of the leaf with Unifix cubes, which we grouped and counted in tens, we re-measured the drawing of yesterday's leaf. I asked if it would take more or fewer orange Cuisenaire rods (ten centimeters long) to measure the length and asked the children to guess how many before we measured. I'd still like to trace the leaves onto graph paper and do something with area.

I read aloud *Our Trees*, a library book, and talked about trees. We really *do* need to pick a tree to watch through the seasons, to explore under and around it, as they did in the book. Last summer, each participant in the Summer Institute at the Prospect Center had to choose a tree in North Bennington and observe it, and I learned a lot from that experience.

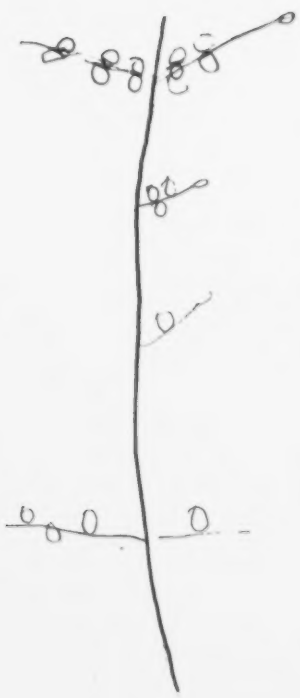
We must also go outside. So many of my memories of fall are associated with the suburban school I attended from fourth grade on. I feel bad that we must be closed into a gray room with *no* view to the outside, with no sense of the seasons except what we bring in.

Handwriting: 5. Write and read: Ann ran, Nan ran, A ram ran.

I showed the children how to use the paint and how to clean the brushes in cold water only.

October 23. One of the boys said he was almost crying about something, but was glad he didn't. I told the children it's okay to cry; I asked if it was okay for boys to cry. Their answer was an emphatic "yes." I told them that the reason I asked was that sometimes people tell boys to be brave and not to cry. Some mentioned Rosie Greer's song, "It's All Right to Cry," on the record *Free to Be You and Me*.

Then I asked, "When do people cry? What makes you cry?" *I cry when someone yells at me...when I get a*



beating...when I feel scared...when I feel sad, like when a pet dies or a person dies. There were several examples of parents crying when grandparents died. Isaac's father died in an automobile accident. I said that my father had died in a truck accident when I was two, but that I didn't remember how I felt. Mark said, "We shouldn't talk about people dying any more." When I asked if it upsets him, he said, "No. But my mother cries when people die, like in other countries and things." I told Mark that I sometimes do that, too.

"Sometimes people cry when they are happy, like when you laugh hard." I said that I sometimes cry when I see something beautiful, like a beautiful painting or a really good movie.

We walked around to the front of the school to look at the trees. I couldn't make the children choose one tree. What would have been the sense of it, anyway? *I* couldn't decide myself. The beech might not change colors, the maple might take too long, the hickory and dogwood have already changed and will lose their leaves too soon. So, we have three or four trees that we're watching. Perhaps we'll go to see them twice a week.

October 24. During the Paper Bag Guessing Game, when a child brings a toy and is asked the question, "Is it a boy's toy (or a girl's toy?)," I try to convince the children that there is no such thing. The children are not really convinced that a doll can be a boy's toy, especially when it is a Barbie doll. Today when Reggie had a car in his bag and we were trying to guess what kind, Jimmy said, "Is it a girl's kind of car?" I need to get that book about girls playing with *boys'* toys.

After a discussion of how to behave on a walk, we went for a walk around the entire block. We pointed out things to each other as we walked: squirrels, dogs, cats, leaves and trees, stones, and about 25 osage oranges on the sidewalk under a tree on Manheim Street. The children greedily gathered them to take back. Tracey brought back some twigs "so that I can find nuts inside."

October 27. The kids were full of weekend stories, so I abandoned the handwriting lesson I'd planned. Jimmy went to the Pocono Mountains. It snowed. Ben and Paul went to a haunted house. Felicia's dad had a meeting at a motel and she went, too. Edward's friend has a spooky house in his basement. Maria was awakened by a mouse in her room.

There wasn't enough time for all of the stories, so I reminded the children that they could tell me their stories by drawing them in their books. I gave out the books immediately. Interestingly, only those kids who had shared a story drew it. Talking first seems to help the writing so much.

I read from a book about seeds. Then I talked more about the growth cycle and told the children that only oak trees will grow from oak seeds (acorns), etc.

I explained tonight's homework assignment and answered questions. "You should ask for help. Most people won't be able to read it." I did this to reassure them.

October 28. We counted the money for the trip in both English and Spanish. Enrico led the counting in Spanish. I explained that 100 pennies is worth one dollar. I asked, "What color is a penny?" We counted like this: One...*uno*, two...*dos*, etc. When we got to 16 I said, "In Spanish you say *diez y seis* and that means 10 plus six or 10 and six. *Diez y siete* means 10 plus seven in Spanish." We continued.

When we were finished, Leonard said, "I thought you said we had $100." Once again, I explained that if you had 100 pennies, you could go to the bank and change them for one dollar. (I explained all of this in Spanish, too.) Then I asked how many dollars you could get for 400 pennies, 200 pennies, 800 pennies, etc.

John Green, one of the kids who just finished two years with me, came to visit from third grade. He came to see the mice he had cared for during the summer, and to see the baby mice. A nice conversation emerged with the class.

First, he told about the mice he had cared for and how he did it. Then, I asked the children to describe how the baby mice had changed since they were born, since John had not seen them. Many children contributed to the description, which let me know that many of them had observed the mice: *They were red, then pink. Their eyes were closed. They grew. They had white fur, eyes open, dark fur. They climbed on the mother to get milk from her.* "From on top of her?" I asked, sounding incredulous. *No.* Loudly and in unison. *The breasts are underneath.*

We have a new child, Jose, who speaks no English, though he understands a little. He came into the office crying. When I took his hand and tried to walk away from his parents, he really sobbed. As we walked, I kept repeating, *"Muchos ninos en esta escuela, muchas ninas en esta escuela."* It was almost a chant, and necessary because it was 8:45 on a rainy day and we were being jostled by crowds of children entering school.

I asked Enrico to help Jose put away his coat. By the time everyone was seated on the rug, he had stopped crying. I collected the trip money and permission slips. Then I introduced him, reminding the children how lucky we are to be learning Spanish, and how lucky Enrico and Jose are to be learning English.

I asked Enrico to help Jose and he had Jose sit near him. He helped Jose to write his name. I also got Demari (from Ginny Bommentre's room) to translate my directions to draw a self-portrait in his writing book, but she never did get him to understand. Jose and Enrico conversed as they drew, and Enrico brought him to me when they finished. As the two waited in line to show me their drawings, they talked about the insects,

seeds, shells, leaves, branches which were on the display table. Other children joined them.

Jose comfortably explained what he had drawn. He copied the words I wrote in English (though he had a lot of trouble copying). He knew *monster*, *car*, *airplane*, which were all in his picture.

When the conference was finished, Jose discovered the rabbit and mice. He watched and touched them and talked about them. He came to me unhesitatingly to ask to go to the bathroom. By 10 a.m. he was quite comfortable.

When the children got into line I placed him near Belinda, who I knew would care for him. At lunch, I explained, through Enrico, that he would eat lunch and then go outside. He asked me what the different foods were. I helped him to taste things. I told him to turn around so that he could see and wave to his sisters. Since lunch at our school is so loud and hectic, I felt it would make him happy to see them.

It's funny, I've begun to speak to Enrico in English, forgetting that he doesn't understand much. I keep thinking that he will be able to translate for Jose.

One of the ways in which I help children who don't speak English to feel comfortable is to ask them in Spanish how to say this or that in Spanish. Today Bethann came to me and said that she was telling Jose about the rabbit. I tried to teach her how to ask him the Spanish name for things. Then I demonstrated. It might be good to encourage the children to do this by practicing in a whole group.

I need to summarize all the things I did to help Jose: Soothing voice, hold his hand, chant to calm him. Assign a child to help; one who speaks the same language, if possible. Use the child's language together with English, if possible. Have lots of interesting objects in the room to provide common experiences which bring all the children together. Help him to see some familiar faces in an unfamiliar place at lunch by pointing to his sisters, introducing him to the lunch aide, assigning someone to help him, and staying with him for a while.

I want the children to feel privileged to be in a class with children who speak languages other than English. I allow no teasing and tell them so. When the children speak a nonsense language, I know it's not to tease or to make fun. They are, in a sense, trying to imitate the sounds.

Lloyd made fun of Jose's name. I told him that just because there is no one else in the class named Jose, that's no reason to laugh at it. I said he'd get used to the name. Besides, there's no other Lloyd in our room, either.

Singing with the kids really does calm me when I'm feeling tense. It is good to do when I must take the whole group to the bathroom and they have to wait in line for turns.

October 29. We took a trip to a new Nature Center at Andorra. It's really just a lot of paths through the Wissahickon Valley (a woodland preserve along a creek in Philadelphia that is part of the city's park system). We had two guides and it was lovely to be out in the woods on such a cool day.

The guides gave the children colored papers and asked them to match the colors they saw around them to these, to encourage them to pay attention to detail. The children talked with one guide about how trees change. The guide started with spring but I suggested he start with fall. Mark talked about evergreens. Children found some seeds. Later we had a discussion about how animals keep warm in winter.

I find myself terribly tense on trips, and I really need to do something about it. I seem to be very rigid, worrying about whether or not the kids will be able to hear, understand, answer questions, behave. I want everyone to listen. My voice gets louder and louder, until I feel I am screaming for silence. I get mad if even one child is not listening or paying attention. Then, if I see children acting in a wild way (jumping on others' backs, pushing into a group of people, crawling around loudly) or if I see kids fighting, I get furious and louder. There must be a way of changing this, but right now I feel that I'm pushing this group, which started out to be calm and lovely, into a loud, rude, noisy, and keyed-up class.

October 30. I wanted the children to look carefully at some of the things they had brought back from the trip to the Nature Center and to talk about them. We had lots of other things to do this morning, but I really wanted to talk about the trip.

Mark had found a branch from a white birch tree which he wanted to use for Twenty Questions. The children guessed that it was a branch. Then someone asked, "Did someone paint that white?" I asked the children how this branch got to be white. One child said, "The tree just grows that way." Another thought that I had painted it and another thought I had wrapped something around the branch.

When I asked what the outside part of the tree is called, Diana called it *skin*. I said that in a way it *is* skin, though it is usually called *bark*. The bark is like the skin of the tree and, just like skin, it comes in a variety of colors and shades. I took the very rough bark Felicia had found and I held it next to Mark's branch. I said, "Just like in all of you, there are lots of shades of white and brown in the tree bark." The children described all the shades of light and dark they could see in their own skins. I reminded them that white skin isn't really white like Atiya's shirt; and that when we say *black* it's not really as black as my plan book. Atiya said that people think that she and Jimmy are brother and sister because their skin is the same shade.

I asked the children if they knew what I mean when I say "Native Americans." They didn't, so I told them. I told them that long ago Native Americans sometimes peeled the bark off of birch trees and used it instead of paper for drawings, and also used it for boats. Mrs. Smith, a parent who was helping me, told the children that she and her husband peeled some bark from a birch tree when they were on their honeymoon and then made pages for their wedding album. She said she'd bring it to show the class. (I wonder if that bark can grow back. I wouldn't want to encourage the kids to peel bark if it doesn't grow back.)

I showed the children some more seed pods and seeds and rocks, and promised to bring out the binocular microscope for them to see them in closer detail.

Several parents came to help the children to cut Jack-O'-Lanterns and apples for applesauce.

For homework yesterday I asked the children to bring one apple each for our applesauce. I chose five apples, all different from each other, placed them in a row on the floor in the center of our circle, and asked the children to look carefully at them and to describe the differences. They talked about the differences in color, size, shape. They focused on the differences in the stems.

I couldn't resist. I said, "It's so interesting to me. They're all apples, and they're all delicious, but they're all different. That's what I love about you. You're all different."

The children remembered the recipe for applesauce from kindergarten and dictated it while I wrote it on large paper.

I showed them how to safely cut the apples. "If I cut an apple in half, how many pieces will I have? How many pieces will I have if I cut it in quarters or fourths?"

I showed the children the food mill and asked them what it does. *It keeps the seeds and skin back while it lets the applesauce go through.* I asked them what we would have to do if we didn't use the food mill. We talked about other cooking devices.

The children reminisced about making applesauce in nursery school or in Susan's or Peggy's classes.

During the last five minutes of the day, the 35 children each got a chance to turn the food mill five times as we made applesauce. I was sorry to have to rush them.

Though I had planned to go ahead with apple and pumpkin cutting even if no parents had come, I'm glad I had two to help. I'm having trouble adjusting to 35 kids and no assistant.

Belinda had complained privately that people were teasing her because she has a boyfriend. (I hadn't realized.) I asked her how they knew, and she said, "Because I'm always asking him if he wants to play with me." I asked the class, "How many boys in this room have girl-

friends? I'm not going to ask who they are." About half of the boys raised hands. Jimmy urged William (who always teases *him* about having a girlfriend) to raise his hand. "C'mon William, *you* have a girlfriend."

"How many girls have...." A few giggles on both sides. I assured the children that it's okay to have boy or girlfriends, and it's okay for boys and girls to play together and to talk to each other. "In fact, I like to see boys and girls working together. But some girls are being teased when they play with boys, and some boys are being teased when they play with girls. And that upsets them. Now that you know it's okay to play with each other, there shouldn't be any more teasing. You don't have to say "OOO-EEE" when you see a boy and girl together. You don't have to make them kiss, and you shouldn't push them into each other."

Atiya raised her hand and then said, "No, I can't tell you!" She told me secretly. "A boy shouldn't get on top of a girl in bed, either." I whispered to Atiya, "Yes, there are some things that adults do when they love each other that are different from what children do when *they* like each other."

October 31. Halloween was the calmest it has ever been, both in my room and in the school. Many parents helped and one even brought costumes for those who had none. I had also come prepared with large masks on sticks.

Many parents came back in the afternoon to participate in the party. A few stayed through lunch and helped fill the Halloween bags. We talked especially about these parents' worries about their childrens' learning (backwards numbers and letters, especially). It's nice to feel confident about things working out for children. I tried to calm them, based on my experience both with my own kids, and with my teaching. We also talked about husbands and what they do at home; about Isaac's father's death, and his willingness to talk about it.

Our school parade on Halloween is really a wonderful tradition, especially the teachers' dressing up and clowning around. Not many schools would chance 1100 kids outside at once, sometimes unsupervised, while their costumed teachers march around.

I love it when I dress up in costume and the kids aren't sure it's me and I deny (afterwards) any knowledge of what happened at the parade. When I took my nose and glasses off in class, they said, "I *knew* it was you," which gives away their uncertainty.

We played two number games, Guess My Number and Guess My Rule. I didn't ask them to verbalize the rules but just to guess what number comes out of the machine.

November 3. Today I asked the children whether they would prefer Project Time in the morning or in the afternoon, as it is. Everyone began to discuss it at once, and I suggested that we take a vote. (It would have been better to have said, "This is too much noise. You can't

even hear each other. Can you think of a better way that we could decide?)

I asked, "What's a vote?" Most talked about the presidential election and their parents' preferences. Together we decided how they would do the vote. I reminded them to choose what *they* really wanted, not because their friends chose it. I reminded them to keep both questions in mind: Do you want Project Time in the afternoon? Do you want Project Time in the morning?

It was clear to me just how important it is to the children to have Project Time in the morning. Only four children chose the afternoon. I really didn't know that it made such a difference, though I know *I* like it better that way. I'd like to talk to the children about their reasons for the choice. I think that (1) it's what they were used to in kindergarten, (2) they are afraid they won't get Project Time in the afternoon if they don't get it in the morning; they can't think that far ahead, and (3) they can't wait.

What concerns me is that the children say, "Won't we get a chance to play today?" when they mean, "Will we have Project Time?" It's the word *play* that gets me....

November 6. Before our museum trip, there was an assembly. A man with a crippling handicap spoke to the children about his experiences, and showed a film about the Special Olympics, in which he participated and won a medal.

Because I didn't know what his disability might be, I talked to the children about the possibility of their seeing someone who might appear strange to them. He might have something wrong with his body that makes him move unlike most people or he might have to be in a wheelchair. I moved as someone with cerebral palsy might, and then as a crippled person with a limp might move. Before I did it, I told the children that they might think I look silly, but that they should try not to laugh. The children got excited and immediately began to tell about people they knew who were disabled in some way. They talked about how hard it is not to stare.

The children in the audience, all kindergarteners and first and second graders, were silent and attentive during the talk before the film.

During the talk, I turned to look at my children and found Belinda staring at me. She winked at me and I winked back. On the way to the bathroom, before our trip, Belinda told me she's a little like that man--handicapped--because she uses a nebulizer every day, and other children don't. She has cystic fibrosis. She said, "That makes me different." I added that she also takes pills before she eats. I told her that she might *feel* different, but that no one really knows about it but her. She doesn't *look* different.

November 7. I started to read *The Courage of Sarah Noble* to the children. The book is a re-creation of the true story of an eight-year-old girl who accompanied her father to his new land in Bedford, Massachusetts, during the 18th century. During the following summer, he left her with the local Native Americans.

By the stillness in the room as I read, I could tell that the children would enjoy this book. There were many places in the story where I could stop and ask the children how they'd feel if they were Sarah: *Did you ever feel like Sarah? Did you ever sleep outside?....Did anyone ever try to scare you by teasing you? Did you ever do it to someone else?....Did you ever miss your parents? ....What does your mother do for you that is special?....*

Finally, I reminded the children of the words Sarah's mother said when they said good-bye, and which Sarah repeated again and again, "Have courage, Sarah Noble."

The children had asked me whether or not we would finish *Little House in the Big Woods*. I've hesitated because I didn't think they were interested; sometimes they got restless as I read. I purposely stopped at the Christmas portion, thinking I would go back to it. Today I asked who wanted me to finish reading it. *Everyone* did.

I put a large, flat, smooth stone in the middle of our circle and asked if anyone could guess what it was. They thought it might be a cushion or a pillow or a seat. Someone asked, "Did the Indians use it?" Finally someone did guess. It's a grinding stone. I told the children how I found it in the Lycoming Creek in north central Pennsylvania, where many other artifacts have been found. We will use it at Thanksgiving. Yesterday at the museum we saw several grinding stones.

Since Project Time is in the morning, there's time to show the children the work that was done at Project Time, and to talk about it and describe it. That gives them lots of ideas.

November 10. I took the children down to Ned Carroll's and Rita Carney's third- and fourth-grade class to see a block building made by children who were in my room last year. We sat in a circle around the structure. The children described it, noticing its symmetry; the contrast between the open and closed spaces; the upright, open support on the bottom which was strong enough to hold many more blocks on top; the shape of the building; the variety of shapes of the blocks that were used. There was much more, and the discussion went on for a long time. Everyone participated.

The book situation in the classroom library is driving me crazy. Because we lost time at the beginning of school I still haven't unpacked many of the boxes. That makes it easy for the kids to hide their favorite books: *Star Wars, Look out for Pirates, Superman.* Sometimes they're careless and either disfigure the books or

misplace them. Though I've color-coded most of the books, they still get mixed up. The coding tape is drying and coming off, and I can't keep up with repairs. Perhaps I have too many books. (Is that possible?)

I very angrily showed the children how to put the series books away. It took a long time because I made each child in the class put one book away in its place.

November 12. I finally finished constructing the *What I Will Be For Halloween* book, a simple, teacher-made book with pictures the children drew of themselves, and read it to them. (I've purposely limited the vocabulary: "I will be Batman on Halloween, said Jane.") Then I showed them the other teacher-made books with kids' stories and pictures, and suggested that they would be good to read at Quiet Reading Time.

Ben and Henry built a sturdy, yet delicate building in the blocks. They said it was based on the one in 111. Felicia and Susan also built more intricately than I'd seen before. I'd like to continue to show them other examples of older children's work.

November 13. I read some more of *Sarah Noble.* When she and her father slept outside, the night sounds frightened her. I asked them to say what night sounds they might have heard, and which ones scare them: *People walking around downstairs....Creaks in the house....People breathing....Mice.*

Before I left school to give blood I explained the procedure to the kids. Many of them have had blood tests and were anxious to talk about their experience.

November 17. I continued reading *The Courage of Sarah Noble.* The children knew she was afraid the Indians might attack and that she might never see her family again. I asked the class if they were ever afraid something bad might happen to them. Many of them have had babysitters and have been afraid their parents wouldn't come home. Many are afraid of ghosts and monsters. Jill is afraid of noises when she goes camping. Atiya once had to stay at her uncle's house when her mother was sick and she was afraid her mother would (she started to say "die") have to go to the hospital. Belinda has been afraid that her mother might not pick her up after school, even though I've called home to check.

The discussion was full and, as with all such discussions, the children sat still and really listened to one another. It was so good for Belinda to hear what other children are afraid of, and they, too, are afraid even when there seems to be no need.

Later, Belinda was crying on the way back from music and I said, "Remember Sarah Noble. Try to be like her and say to yourself, 'Have courage, Belinda Creighton, have courage!'" She liked that.

November 18. Belinda has been telling herself to have courage and it's at least helping her to fight tears, even if it doesn't get rid of the fears.

Bad treatment of books continues. I guess it won't improve unless I get the room in order, and when on earth will I ever find time for that?

November 20. We went to look at our trees. (We call it "visiting the trees.") Henry's tree, the maple, has suddenly lost almost all its leaves. Lloyd said, "It's naked," and everyone dissolved into giggles. They noticed thicker and fewer branches on the bottom and thinner and more branches on the top.

The beech tree still has golden-brown leaves. It has lost about a quarter of its top leaves but there are still plenty on the bottom. The children noticed "white things" where leaves had fallen off. I asked what they thought these might be. Most thought they were seeds. Some called them *balls*. Only Atiya thought they were buds. I told the children I would not tell them, but that they should keep watching the tree and they would find out.

Thumb-sucking drives me crazy when the child falls into a stupor when he or she does it. I talked to the children about how much it bothers me. I said I don't care if they do it at home, and I can understand why people do it, but I wish they would try to stop sucking thumbs in school. Children talked about how they stopped sucking their thumbs and about their parents' attempts to stop smoking. I said, "It's harder to stop sucking your thumb because you always have it with you." They laughed.

Sarah Noble ended today, and I cried at the family's reunion. It was hard for me to read it. I explained that I often cry about happy things. But I was *really* crying because I was so glad I'd read the book. So many wonderful discussions.

November 21. We're planning to have a Thanksgiving celebration with the children in room 216, who have been labeled Educationally Mentally Retarded (EMR). Our celebration is an almost exact copy of what Peg Perlmutter has done for years with kindergarten and nursery school children. The children will bring a piece of fruit or nuts to share. We'll slice the fruit (I finally realized they don't like fruit salad) and crack the nuts using different kinds of nut crackers. We'll cook cornbread and popcorn, and we'll make butter by pouring cream into a jar and shaking it around the circle.

Ms. Rose told the children she likes to come to our class to help them because they are special. (She meant that the class is special.) Belinda said, "I'm special because I have to use my nebulizer and I hate it." There was a little more talk about what is special about a few of the kids.

Ms. Rose mentioned today's frost. It reminded me that Enrico had brought *nieve* (snow) in his hand, which

he put into a glass. He got it, and we all looked at the dirty water. He seemed genuinely surprised. I asked him if there is snow in Panama. He said, "no." Then I translated our conversation to the children.

I asked the children if they had noticed the frost. They described frost, and then Tami (whose speech problems do not stop her from standing and speaking to the whole class, though it is hard to understand her) told about frost on her father's car.

Belinda asked, "How do you make frost, anyway?" In turn, I asked the children to explain. Then I told them about dew.

November 23. Life has been so rushed that we haven't had a chance to talk in a relaxed way.

Today we had our Thanksgiving feast. The children from 216 and our class shared the work and the food. It was fun having Dorothy, Rhonda, and A.C. to help. They'd all been in my class two years ago. They were tremendously helpful because they knew the routines and expectations.

The older children in 216 set up the room in a huge circular table, and the children from both classes sat together. Lots of parents and siblings came.

Every year at Thanksgiving, we make a fruit graph, and this year was no exception. I drew the different kinds of fruit people brought and each child put an "X" in the column for the kind of fruit she or he brought. Then the children explained what the graph told us, while I wrote the explanation.

Clean-up after a feast is always so interesting. The floor was covered with nut shells and crumbs and looked as if it would never get clean. Chairs and desks were all over the place. Then my 33 kids got to work like elves, put the furniture back into place with little adult supervision, and cleaned up the crumbs. They seemed to enjoy the challenge.

December 1. At meeting, we talked about what we did during Thanksgiving vacation: trips to grandparents' and aunts' homes; dinners at home; the parade; a plane trip to Detroit; what I did. Then I listed some of my plans for the week: *Disassembling the display table and asking the children to decide whether to take their seed and stone contributions home, to give them to me, or to throw them away....Plans for decorating the table for Christmas. (This brought lots of excitement.)....Gift possibilities for parents and others....Room decorations....The gingerbread house.*

We went to visit our trees. The children asked to do it, which pleased me. Seeing the bare branches, they repeated that the trees are naked (giggling). One child said that the tree had lost its hair.

I asked the children to notice the configuration of the trunk and the major branches of a magnolia tree we passed on the way to the front of the school. As we

walked, I pointed out the tall, thick, straight trunk of the beeches in comparison. I've never really taken a long look at the form of a tree without its leaves. It's a powerful experience.

I asked what color the trunks were. Some said "brown," automatically; others noticed that they were gray.

We walked close to and around our beech tree. It was the first time we've gone so close to it. The children noticed the circles on the bark, and roots of the tree (the "foot" they called it), and how much roots really do look like feet. They noticed the cracks. There is a nest in the tree. Each thing they noticed raised a question. Here are some of the questions: *How did the circles get there? Look at the lines around the circles. How did* they *get there? What makes the cracks? Who or what lives in the nest? How do the birds and squirrels keep warm in the winter? Why do the leaves fall off the trees when the wind blows? How did this tree grow? Why do leaves change color? Where will the green leaves come from?*

Always, I ask if anyone knows an answer to the question, and let the children explain what they think the answers are. When I'm afraid of giving wrong information I say, "I don't know, but we could find out if you want to."

Most of the things they noticed also evoked a memory and led to a little discussion: *"My dad cut down a tree because it was leaning on our house." "Our tree at home has a nest, too." "I remember this tree sheltering the teachers from the rain during the strike. Would it keep us dry now if it started to rain?"*

I'll want to go closer to Henry's maple next week. I am not at all surprised that when we changed our perspective on the tree new questions and new excitement emerged. The same thing had happened to me as I observed my tree at Prospect.

It's December 1st, but we *did* celebrate the November birthdays with the popcorn we forgot to make at the Thanksgiving feast.

We looked at the calendar and talked about all the days we have off in December, about Christmas, and about the coming new month and new year. "We'll have to wait all these days until the new year."

December 2. The children and I dismantled the display table which was filled with things they'd gathered at home and brought to share. They let me keep their bark, large pine cones, rocks, bird's nest, seeds, and nuts. I put them into a box with the microscope and magnifying glasses and the children will be able to continue to look at them during Project Time, when they have a choice of activities.

At Project Time, we started to make the gingerbread house. I worked at a table in the middle of the room with some of the slower readers, but anyone who wished

to, could join us. I wrote "sugar," "margarine," "molasses," "flour" in lower case letters on cards and asked the children to match them to the labels on the ingredients. Some had trouble because labels are written in capital letters and they didn't know the corresponding lower case letters.

While we were cooking, the children reminisced about making gingerbread houses in kindergarten.

I passed around a little molasses (to taste) and cinnamon, cloves, and vanilla (to smell) while the children worked on their projects.

I noticed how difficult it was for Reggie to wash the bowls and spoons because he'd never washed dishes before. I'm thinking about assigning two kids a day to keep the sink and utensils clean.

When the children came back from science, I asked them to sit on the rug. I showed them the paper patterns for the gingerbread house pieces and held up half the house to show them what it will look like when finished. I'm not sure they were able to imagine the other half.

Then I asked them to try to fit all the pieces onto the dough. It's like a puzzle and it took quite a bit of maneuvering. As I cut around the pattern, I asked the children what shape it was (rectangle), how many sides it has, and to find other things shaped like rectangles in the room. I did the same with the triangular piece. (I didn't realize there were so many triangles in the room.) It would be good to make a chart of the two, and perhaps things shaped like a circle. I asked one child to count how many sides this shape has:

When the outline of one half the house was finished, we counted the pieces. I asked, "If these five pieces are half of the house, how many pieces will make the whole house?" Only two guessed correctly.

Everyone got a taste of the raw batter as they left the school.

Yesterday's homework was: write a list of words about outer space. Because there is a whole group of kids who constantly draw space pictures and need space words for their stories, I'll make a chart from the list and hang it....

December 4. The gingerbread house was assembled in front of the whole class. Everyone stood around the table. There was a lot of pushing and. "There's no room for me." We had the usual exciting moments when the house walls fall in or out, and when the roof pieces slide down. I'm used to leaning blocks against the pieces to support them until they dry.

There was lots more talk about last year's houses in K-1 and K-6 and how they were different from this one. They asked questions: *What makes it brown? Why do we need blocks? Will we put candy on it?* Robbie said that if this were a real house made out of candy he'd bang

into the walls and then eat the broken pieces. This led to a discussion of real houses.

I've sometimes thought we should make gingerbread houses at the beginning of a long look into houses around the world, rather than at Christmas.

Jane cries each time she sees the Lippincott workbooks come out! She's learning sight words from the little Bowmar Breakthrough books, and she goes over one of those books day after day--practicing. She feels comfortable with that approach and tense with Lippincott. I know that part of *her* tension is because *I* am tense with it.

Foster, her friend, constantly says, "I can't," when asked if he's learning to read; or "I don't know" if he's asked to name a letter that I point to. If he does take a guess, it is *always* without thought, full of tension and tears, and wrong. He seems to be nervous and blocked when approaching letters, but not so with numbers.

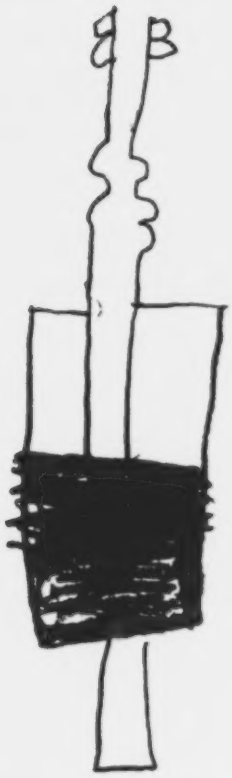
Little by little, though, he is making some headway. He adds words to his writing card box--*king, horse, car*--as he needs them for his stories. He uses the picture dictionary to find the words, probably asking someone in the room what letter the word starts with. For several days after he finds the words, his pictures will be about one of those things. He knows he can read and write the words on the spaces I leave in his dictation. He approaches the whole writing experience eagerly, and never says, "I can't."

Yesterday he chose a Breakthrough book called *My Fish* and read the word *fish* each time it appeared. What delight. Today he said, "I'm learning to read. Remember that book I read yesterday?" If only he can keep feeling good about the small bits of progress he is making.

Sally gets terribly nervous around words and letters. For her, too, the drawing-writing book is a good entry into reading. "Do I have the word was in my box?" "I don't know. It starts with *w*," I said. She went back and looked and saw that she didn't have it. She knows letters but gets nervous about letter-sounds; gets nervous and forgets when asked about words. She is completely relaxed with her writing book.

December 5. Mark and I were chatting and he suddenly said, "Sometimes it's good when you tell us to do things." I asked him what he meant. He said, "Well, remember the day you made me and Ben paint? We didn't want to at first, but we really liked it. Now we like to paint. It was good because how would we know if we like it, if we don't try it?" How reasonable. I don't think *I* told him that.

We went to visit the tree at Henry's house. Mark said, "Oh, I get it. We go every Monday." Last week we went on Monday, too, but that's because both Mondays were warmer days.



We noticed that the maple bark is different from the bark on the beech tree. It is rougher and there are no circles on it. The larger branches are at the bottom. There are lots of smaller ones at the top. We saw buds (as yet not called that by the children). Some branches are touching the house next door. For some reason, it is not as interesting to visit the maple as the beech, perhaps because we can't get far enough away from the trunk and still be under the tree. There's more space around the beech tree.

December 12. For homework last night the children had to write a list of holiday words. We talked first about Hanukkah. Then I asked each child for a contribution to the list. The children really use these lists to help with spelling words in their stories, and I'll leave them up in the room, even when the holiday season has passed.

We visited the tree today because I wanted to see it after the snow. Unfortunately, the snow was not deep, and things really weren't transformed the way they are in a deep snow. This snow just coated the grass, put a shadow of powder on the larger branches, and wet the ground. The children still focused on the leaves and didn't really notice the snow until I pointed it out. Belinda also noticed that the maple branches curve upwards (she made an arm motion to describe this) while the beech branches go straight out. Jimmy said, "I can see the buds. Leaves will grow from them."

Felicia arrived crying because her older sister wouldn't let her bring her snowball into school. Before we came inside, I asked each person who wanted to, to make a snowball to bring inside. We put them into a bowl and left it on the table. At the end of the day, we looked at the melted, muddy snow.

Isaac brought a brass menorah for the class to see, and the children described it in terms of number and pattern. They took a long time describing the Star of David accurately. When I said, "It's balanced. What does that mean?" they said, "It won't fall over." I explained that I was talking about its being symmetrical. Isaac then told how and in what order the candles are lit each night. (I should have asked the children to guess how many candles are lit during all the nights of Hanukkah.)

We won the Home and School Association Membership Drive contest for our grade, and got a $20 check to buy something for our classroom. The children suggested a doll, cars, puppets. I'd like to continue this discussion.

Jill, Ali, Lloyd, Mark, Benjamin, and Ben all wanted to work in the blocks. Through my years of teaching "integrated" classes, I've noticed that there has been very little exchange between the white and black boys in the blocks and (less often) between boys and girls. That is, white kids seem to play with white kids, and black kids seem to play with black kids. (There have been exceptions, of course.) I don't know if it is right to try to

change this, but it's hard for me to see people working in such close quarters not working together at least once in a while. (I'm not certain that this also happens with the Lego. I think that generally groups of friends choose blocks, and if you have no white or black friends there's no mix.)

Anyway, I called the six children over to me after everyone had finished signing up for Project Time. I said, "I see three white boys, two black boys, and one white girl. I've noticed that in the block corner, white and black kids usually don't work together; neither do boys and girls. That upsets me sometimes. I like to see people sometimes work with people who they don't usually work with. I like to see people sometimes work with people who are not their good friends. Today, before you go into the blocks, I want you to have a meeting together to decide what you're going to build. You should plan your structure together and everyone should work on it together. I don't mean that you all have to build one building. You can each take a part or an area. But you should talk about it before you start. And maybe you could work with someone you don't usually work with."

I really didn't get back to them until the structure was almost completed. But when I did, I saw all the children working together. They had built one of those very elaborate, balanced structures--tall, sturdy, and airy--like the one they'd seen in Room 111. I asked if they had all worked together, and they told me which part each had done. I know that if I had not said anything, Jill would have worked in a corner by herself; Lloyd and Ali would have built together, possibly knocking down another building while searching for blocks; and Benjamin and Ben would have worked together, complaining about Ali and Lloyd.

I'm not sure if it was the right thing to do or not, but it could not have hurt, since no one objected and since they did it. If they really had not wanted to, or if they simply hadn't done it, I would not have pushed too hard.

December 18. I decided to make peppermint ice cream. To do that, we had to mash candy canes. But before we mashed them, I asked the children to sit in a circle on the floor, to pass a candy cane around the circle, and to say one thing about it. The children talked about the pattern made of red and white and then turned the cane in different directions. Held this way , it looked like a cane, a hook, a crook, part of a 2; this way , it looked like an umbrella handle, a J, a fish hook; this way , it looked like ice skate blades or a sled. When I removed the cellophane wrapping they talked about taste, smells, and Christmas memories.

We put the candy canes into a paper bag, and smashed them with a brick. Each person got a taste. We made ice cream. Whoever wanted to, joined me. We talked about dissolving liquids, the ingredients, the purpose of the salt.

December 22. I sent a note home yesterday, saying that our holiday party would be held at 1:15, and inviting parents to join us by 1:00. Somehow, I got quite confused, and started the party at 12:15. I couldn't imagine why the parents who said they would join us were not there. Belinda and Paul were upset. Belinda said, "Are you sure this is the right time? My dad said he would be here at 1:00." Suddenly I realized my mistake! I promised the children that we would have enough ice cream left for the parents, and we'd work something out.

We had another party when the kids came back from music and everyone was happy.

I asked the children to tell me about Christmas. Then I asked them if anyone knew what Kwanza is. (I'm not sure I know much about it myself,* and I was sorry that I started the discussion.) Before we even got to tell about the holiday, I asked if anyone in the room is Afro-American. Only Felicia raised her hand (and she has a Caucasian mother). I said other words people use instead of Afro-American are black, Negro, colored, and asked the question again. This time *all* the black children raised their hands. Someone told Felicia, who has very long black hair and looks like a Native American, that she is not black. Again and again we seem to get into discussions about skin color, but all the children seem to do with it is talk about who is light, dark, tones of brown. I'm ready to have some other discussions about differences, but I'm not sure exactly where to go with them.

*An African-American holiday celebrated on the days between Christmas and New Year's Day.

My husband visited the class this morning, and got involved with Belinda and Jimmy, asking them math questions. Looking at the drawers where the children keep their things, he said, "If you put three pencils in each of these drawers, how many pencils will you have?" The children counted three numbers for each drawer, until they finished (27). Bert then asked how many pencils the other cabinet (with the same number of drawers) would hold. There was some discussion about whether or not they could hold the same number. The questioning went on for quite a while. Jimmy kept wanting to get away to work in his writing book. Belinda wanted to show just how well she can multiply.

At 2:15 it was time to take down the Gingerbread house. It had been on the Christmas Table since the first week in December. At least three times a day this week, I was asked when we would knock it down. Avise Ewell, the Social Studies teacher, was passing by, and I asked her to do the honors. She counted to three, and hit the house with a block. Everyone gasped as the roof caved in. "You're a wicked witch. You knocked down our house," one child said.

Avise continued to break the walls, but said, "If I had known the children would feel that way, I'd never have done this." I assured her that if I'd known they'd call her a witch, I'd never have asked her.

"Look at the dead house," Foster said, as I carried the tray to the door to give a piece of the house to each child. It is hard to describe the excitement surrounding that house, but it does have a life of its own. And when it falls, it seems like a person who suddenly collapses.

January 5. We haven't seen each other for 14 days. Everyone sat in a circle, and I asked the children to talk about what they did during their vacation. There were only 26 children, so it was much easier than 34, and the children listened better than usual. There was lots of talk about visiting families, playing with toys, hanging around.

Maria brought the calendar, and I asked the children to tell me what I should change. Then I held up each of the cards with the years 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1981--all out of order, and they had to guess which was the right year. I did the same with the months. Then I moved the numbers, talking about today and what day it is, what day the first fell on, etc.

Belinda told us that her brother might go to England by himself when he is 10. This started a discussion of where the children had gone during Christmas vacation (Ben to Jamaica, Jimmy to New York, Sally to Canada) and where they might go when they get big (Edward to Japan).

I got the globe for the first time this year, to show them where those places are in relation to Philadelphia. But, because it was the first time, I wanted to introduce it.

"What's a globe?" *It tells you where cities are.... Where countries are....Where to go....It's a map....It's the earth....*

"WHAT! The earth? This?" *Well, not the earth. A model of the earth.* "Whew! I was wondering. It's a picture of the earth. Someone drew it from photographs taken from airplanes or satellites. Actually, this globe is a model of the earth because if you feel it, you can tell where the mountains are." Mark said, "It's like what blind people read."

I asked what they could find on the globe, what the blue part means, what the other colors are for. Then I drew a line with my fingers from Philadelphia to the places they had spoken about. When Reggie saw Jamaica on the globe he said, "It's *that* small." I reminded them that the globe isn't really the earth but a small picture of it. I've often had first or second grade children who are interested in maps but who don't understand the scale involved. Just because they can't completely understand it, should I stop teaching or telling about it?

January 6. Jimmy brought a small microscope to school and showed it to the class. I asked what a microscope does. I brought out my binocular microscope and told the children that it is easier to use than Jimmy's, which has one eyepiece. My microscope does not need slides. You

just put an object on the stage and look through the two eyepieces. It's easy to focus and is quite sturdy.

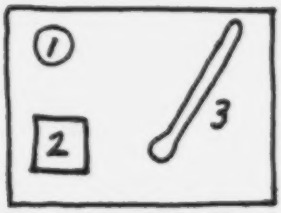
I pulled out the box of objects from the "fall" table and set them on a desk near the microscope. I still get nervous and afraid that someone will accidentally break it, so I hang around when the kids are using it. Besides, I love to look into it!

It snowed again and we visited our trees, then the children made snowballs and went inside. I love the quiet in the streets when it snows.

January 7. Belinda brought a book called *About the Big Sky, About the High Hills, About the Rich Earth, and About the Deep Sea*, by Joe Kauffman. It's one of those detailed picture books filled with information. I think this class could sit through all the information if I wanted them to.

We filled two large bowls of snow and set up the snow experiments I've been doing with the kids for years.* I use unmarked thermometers, and set up a tray for each child. Six children work at the table. The children fill the milk carton with snow and the cup with warm water. Then I let them *mess around* for a while. I ask them what they notice about the thermometer. *It has a red line.* We talk for a while about the red line and where it begins and ends.

*I learned this organization from Vivian Schatz who was a Science Advisor at the District Six Advisory Center.



Small Plastic Tray
① Plastic Cup With Water
② Milk Carton With Snow
③ Thermometer

Then I suggest that they hold the thermometer in one hand with the bulb end in the palm and watch the red line. "Now put the thermometer into the snow and watch. Now put it into your hand. Now into the water. Keep doing that and watch what happens." *The line goes up in your hand and down in the snow....Is it blood in there? ....I'm going to try to get the red line down to the bottom. Let's race! Let's see who can have the shortest line....Why does the line get shorter and longer?* They know thermometers have something to do with heat and cold and realize the line is longer in a warm place than in a cold place. They think if they put the other end in the snow the red line will get shorter.

January 9. Jimmy went home and used a marked thermometer to measure the temperature of water in different parts of the house; boiling water; refrigerated water, etc. Belinda made a poster which described her snow experiment and observations.

The children love Belinda's book *About the Sky, Hills, Earth and Sea.* They look at the pictures and pore over the details, discussing them. I'd like to observe children looking at it to hear what they're getting from it. They asked me to read the book to them.

For several days, we've discussed astronomy, ancient theories, stars, galaxy, universe, constellations, planets, the sun, the moon, the earth, gravity. I really don't like to spurt out facts to the children, especially because I'm afraid of giving them wrong information. It's so hard for *me* to understand distance and scale and

quantity and I wonder what it all means to them. Even the model of the planets that we have in the school gives incorrect information about size and distance. Yet there is a possibility that receiving information they don't understand but which interests them will cause them to ask questions themselves. I'm confused; I felt more comfortable whenever the discussion crossed over from subject matter in the book to personal experiences (weather, lightning, etc.).

The beginning of the book describes how scientists work to explore and explain ideas about the earth and stars. I asked what a scientist does. *Uses a microscope ....Does experiments with chemicals....Makes smoke.... Creates monsters.* I said a scientist is someone who looks carefully at things, who describes things and notices if they are the same or different from the last time he or she looked at them. "When we look at our trees, we're being scientists in a way." It's interesting to me how the idea they get from movies of The Mad Scientist captures them.

Whenever we talk about science, Jill says, "My Dad's a scientist. (He teaches science at one of the Quaker high schools in Philadelphia.) And I have a lot of science things at home." She loves to bring them to show to the class. For her Paper Bag Game, she usually brings something she's made. But with the science things, she shows them directly and explains them in great detail, using very teacherly expression. Today she brought magnets.

January 14. The block structures are lovely, and I've been urging the kids to make maps of some of them. Sometimes they draw side views (elevations), especially of the tall buildings. But with the colored blocks, which are smaller, and with animal houses, which they build on table tops, the children can draw aerial views. They enjoy doing them. Whenever possible, I show the maps at discussion time, and I've made a special bulletin board to display them.

The parents are always surprised about what their children have learned about Martin Luther King Jr. and about how much they seem to understand and remember. I start the discussions about a week before the school holiday so that we will be finished by January 15. They are all based on the reading of the book *Meet Martin Luther King, Jr.* (a Random House Step-Up Book by James T. deKay).

Before I begin, I usually ask the children, "Who was Martin Luther King?" *He got shot in the head....He was the president....He helped Black people....He went on the bus.* I read the book chapter-by-chapter. Sometimes, rather than reading a part with difficult language or ideas, I paraphrase. I stop when I feel an explanation is needed or when the children show me that they need to have a turn to speak or to ask a question. It moves along in a very relaxed manner. Important issues emerge:

segregation, laws, civil disobedience, non-violent resistance. As often as possible, I try to tell stories because the children love and understand the stories: about Rosa Parks, about the sit-ins, about Dr. King in jail, about the 1963 March in Washington, about our school, about white people who supported Dr. King's work.

The children were deeply engrossed in the discussions. They remembered a lot from kindergarten and seem to understand many of the important ideas that were raised. Learning about one important person seems to be a good way to teach history to young children.

"Stand-ups" are cardboard figures, about five inches tall, which stand on plastic stands. They belonged to my own children. They are characters and accessories for fairy tales, pirate stories, witch tales, the Wizard of Oz, outer space adventures. When the children give a play they set the figures on a desk. I think they're a little easier for the children to use than puppets because they don't have to hide to use them. (I don't like them too much.)

Today Jill, Susan, and Pam did the first play with the figures that kept the audience in mind. Their voices were loud enough and the story was coherent. Jill did most of the voices, though Pam helped. It was all dialogue (which Jill writes most of the time in her stories). Susan moved the figures and reminded the others when they forgot something.

January 16. For several years, I've wanted to do a unit, theme, or whatever you want to call it, on "small things." I think I'm finally going to do it. I asked the children if they have any teeny-tiny objects at home. We described some. Then I asked them to bring as many of them as they could to put on the display table. I asked some teachers for some objects, too.

The librarian agreed to gather some books about mice, little people, and small things. I've started my own collection of mouse books, and I put it on a special shelf.

I hope to do a lot with map-making, getting across the idea of smaller in scale. I want to use the microscope. Finally, I'd like to do comparisons with larger things--giants, measuring large things, etc.

I showed the children's drawings at meeting today, calling attention to the many maps of block buildings, animal mazes, and mosaic tile designs.

January 19. Edward's parents are divorced and he lives with his mother. Each weekend he stays with his father, who was born in Japan and who came to the United States to work in the anti-Vietnam War movement. Edward often talked about him and I asked him to invite his father to visit our class. He brought Edward to school today and stayed for a while. Edward showed him his writing books and read to him. I asked Mr. Sato if he would stay and talk to the children. The questions: *Why did you come*

here?....When did you come?....How old are you?....What do they eat?....What language do they speak?....What is it like in Japan?

Mr. Sato described his childhood in a village and his life in Osaka, the city from which he came. He told the children that it's easier to learn to read English than Japanese because we have only 26 letters to learn, while the Japanese have 46. He also taught the children how to count from one to 10. I asked Mr. Sato to write the color-words in Japanese so that I can hang them with the English ones. I'd like to do that with Spanish words also.

It's hard to find a place for all the work I'd like to hang on the walls. (It's also hard to find *time* to hang it all.) I asked the children where they'd like to put the maps of the block buildings, animal houses, and mosaic tile designs they enjoy drawing. They decided they should be put on the bulletin board over the sink.

cocoa	blizzard
hat	turkey
fire	freezing
lights	heater
Eskimo	shovel
skis	red
cold	jacket
frostbitten	covers
ski lift	reindeer
Rudolph	slip
sweater	icicles
sled	boots
snowsuit	tree
freeze	hail
scarf	gloves
snowman	blanket
toys	house
mittens	igloo
foggy	cold
rosy cheeks	ice cube
rain	football
socks	candy cane
slush	ice
warm	hibernate
tea	snowball
polar bear	snowdrift
frost	snow
angel	coat
boiling milk	Santa
ice hockey	stove
presents	Frosty
snowpants	fort
Christmas	fireplace
ice skates	stocking
long underwear	

January 20. A long time ago I asked the children to write a list of winter words for homework (I lost the list three times). What I noticed and pointed out to the children is that lots of the words were about cold things, but even more were about cozy and warm and inside things. I put the words on the wall next to the Halloween and Outer Space words.

After we got the list of winter words one of the children suggested that we make a list of spring words. I asked, "Are there any other lists of words that will help you with spelling? I can put them around the room, and if you need a special word, you could find it." The children were enthusiastic, and I wrote their suggestions: *Spring Words, Summer Words, Animals, Food, Night, Dinosaur Words, Sports, Car and Transportation, Insect Words, Plant and Tree Words, Classroom Words, Feeling, Toys, Names, Military and Army, Water - Underwater, Castle Words, Cowboy and Indian, Fairy Tale Words.* It might also be good to type them and put them into a class book like a dictionary for use during writing time.

I told the children I was planning to read books about mice and other small things, and gave them a choice: *Tom Thumb, Little House in the Big Woods* (to finish it before going on to the others), and *The Littles to the Rescue.* Having just seen a cartoon of *Tom Thumb* at lunch time, they clamored for it and really enjoyed it.

I've noticed how well the children in this class work--how calmly and with much involvement. They seem on the brink of flowing from one activity to another very smoothly, if they only had the time. They are also reluctant to stop work to clean up. I see three possibilities right now: Leave things as they are, shorten Project Time slightly so that they have time for only one activity, or make the whole day one integrated day. I posed it to them--that there would be Project Time all day, but that they would have the responsibility to do

reading, writing, and math each day. Generally, they seemed to like the idea (though I'm not sure they understand). Ben said he doesn't like it because he doesn't need to read at school. He can read at home.

January 21. I finished reading *Tom Thumb* and we discussed what a dunghill is: People use toilets; animals just go wherever they are: mice in the cage; cows in the field when they are outside, on the barn floor when they are inside. Then the bowel movement (dooky, dung) is shoveled into a pile outside the barn. That's where they threw the cow's stomach with *Tom Thumb* inside. *Eew! Yuch!* How do you think *that* smelled?

I read *The Little Giant Girl and the Elf* by Else Minarik, a book about a little girl who is sent to get some flowers from a bush to decorate the table, and an elf who is sent to get a bud and leaf for his table. The girl discovers him on the stem that she brings inside, and must return him to the place where she found him. Paul asked, "Is the girl a little girl or a giant little girl or just a giant to the elf?" We had a discussion about this. I asked, "Why do you think the girl's mother made her return the bush?" *She couldn't keep him. It wouldn't be nice....His mother would worry about him.... So he could find his way home.*

The children want me to read it again and I will. But it's a very easy reader, and many will be able to read it themselves.

I had to remind the children again about keeping away from Ruth, a child in room 114. Paul forgot, and got hurt. He played with her and the play turned rough. I spoke to Ruth. She had been asked by one of my children to help the girls fight the boys. "We've gone over this before, Ruth. The girls can help themselves!" "Girls, you don't need anyone to fight for you."

Project Time/Writing transition will be made easier if I have the sign-up chart ready when the children enter in the morning. Lately, I've been having them sign up after writing, but they continually interrupt me by saying, "Can I work with mice, colored blocks, etc.?" I say, "Check the chart. Count the names." The interruptions continue and I get furious. This way they'll know what they are doing before they sit down to write. They'll still interpret my being there to help them sign up as my giving permission. I'd like them to sign up independently.

January 22. Quiet, shy Tami sat across from Belinda and Jane at the hexagonal table. I've noticed that Belinda and Jane are inseparable, and it's hard for others to break into their play and conversation. When one is missing, the other seems lost--waiting, unable to focus on anything, unwilling to work with other children. As I walked near Tami, she said, "Ms. Strieb, why Belinda and Jane not friends with other kids?" I asked Belinda if she'd heard what Tami said. She hadn't, so I repeated

the question. (I often find myself repeating Tami's questions because her speech is so hard to understand.)

Belinda's face got red and she got excited. She said, "I'm her friend! Remember? I made a house with her." Tami accepted that. She smiled and said she *did* remember. I was thinking out loud when I said, "I wonder how you can tell if someone is your friend?" Then I realized it would be good to talk with the whole class about this.

After lunch we sat in a circle. I've noticed that the children are really making an effort to sit next to people they usually don't associate with. I asked the question, and told the children I would be writing some of the things they said on a piece of paper: *Friends sit near you, save a place for you, make room for you when there's no space....Sometimes you can trust your friend, like with a secret, or not to tease you....Sometimes you can't....You're nice to your friend, you say nice things, you smile at each other and act friendly....You play with your friends, and paint, work, draw, swim, and read with them....Your friend helps you--to do math, with building in the blocks, to write, to read, when you make mistakes. And you help your friend....You don't fight with your friend (well, sometimes)....Your friend takes turns with you when there is only one thing, like a swing....If you don't have anyone to play with, a friend plays with you ....Friends share things--like their bike....When you're sick, your friend sends you a get-well card....If you forget your coat, your friend remembers it and gets it for you....Your friend walks you home, comes to your house and helps you....You let your friend come to your birthday party.*

"How do you get a friend?" Most of the answers centered around helping someone or asking someone who is alone if they would like to do something with you. There was also a lot about *not teasing* and about *stopping when people ask you not to bother them.*

"Is there anyone in this room," I asked, "who thinks he or she has no friends?" *Many* children raised their hands; more than I expected. I started reminding people about those with whom they work, but decided to save that for another time.

"Do you know how this discussion got started?" Belinda explained, and I thanked Tami so much for asking the questions she asked.

I read *The Mouse House* by Arnold Lobel. At Sustained Reading Time, the children are eagerly choosing the mouse books I've been reading to the whole class.

January 23. We had lots of visitors today, even some unexpected ones. I had told the children that our State Representative would visit in the morning, and that friends from other schools would come in the afternoon. The Assemblyman stayed for exactly three minutes. When she found out they wouldn't be back Belinda, whose mother

led him on the tour, said, "Is *that* all? Are you *sure* that was all?"

The children are wonderful with visitors. They just go on and do what they have to do. I get a *little* nervous just because, in school as at home, I am conscious of the mess and feel I need to apologize. I spend frantic hours cleaning, hiding junk, clearing spaces, and fixing up bulletin boards. Why can't I maintain the order? Why do I have to rush immediately before visitors come?

Because I knew there would be different visitors for morning and afternoon who might prefer to see Project Time rather than children working in arithmetic workbooks or in reading groups (like Lee Q.), and also because I've been thinking about a whole day of Project Time, I decided today would be a good time to try it: 9:00 - 9:30 writing, 9:30 - 10:30 project, 11:45 - 12:30 sustained reading, 12:30 - 1:00 discussion, 1:00 - 1:50 project.

I really didn't like it at all. Of course, the kids felt like they were on vacation. I hadn't prepared them for thinking about being responsible for doing something *academic* as well as whatever else. There really was no commitment to work and choices as there is in the morning. I'm sure that with work and preparation, it would get better, but I'm not sure I want to make a big change. I'd rather see the kids encouraged to write, do math projects, etc. as well as the usual choices, at Project Time.

We played the Paper Bag Guessing Game. Many children bring books. Mark brought the transportation sequel to Belinda's *About the Earth*, but there was no time to talk about it.

I read *The Great Hamster Hunt*. Terrific. I wish I'd had it when we had to build the trash can trap for the hamster. Anyway, it showed the kids how I caught the hamster that had escaped.

January 26. Edward brought the Japanese words for the colors, which his father wrote for us. I showed the chart to the children and promised to rewrite the words larger, and to hang them near the English color words. After school today I brush-painted the words, and I learned a lot. I saw immediately how fluid the letters are. He had written them with a ball-point pen, but they take so well to a brush. I also realized immediately that I had the wrong kind of brush--too floppy--so that I could not make strong, sure, single strokes.

Because Mr. Sato had also made a chart of the Japanese alphabet, I learned a little about it, too. I need to put up the color words in Spanish.

Liz (my assistant) and I sat next to each other, and she read *Whose Mouse Are You?* in English and I read it in Spanish. She read a sentence, then I read it. The kids loved it. Enrico helped me with the pronunciation and really laughed at my accent. He did not hesitate to correct me, whether I asked him to or not.

January 27. Last Sunday the Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative met with Pat Carini at Edie Klausner's house. Rhoda Kanevsky brought a tape recording of a child and we listened to and described her reading.* We had a wonderful discussion about children pretending to read, about the natural order a child brings to reading, and about how this might contrast with the conventional order of reading. That seminar has had a wonderful effect on me.

*See Anne Bussis, Edward Chittenden, Marianne Amarel, Edith Klausner. Inquiry Into Meaning: An Investigation of Learning to Read. Lawrence Erlbaum: Hillsdale, NJ, 1985.

Sally's been having a really hard time with reading. She gets so nervous when asked to read, she forgets, she makes wild guesses, she shakes and moves around. I'd vowed to keep away from her rather than ruin things completely for her. At the seminar everything became clear about what I must do with all of those children who have trouble with the conventional order.

I got a Breakthrough Book, *I Fell Down*, and asked Sally to read it to me. I told her it would be all right if she couldn't read the words. She could pretend to read it. So she started by describing the pictures: *He fell down, she fell on top of him, his mother came out, etc.* The story is written in the first person, and I was concerned about what to do about *that*. After she *read it*, I read it to her twice. Then I asked her to *read* it to me again. Then I read it to her. Then, before I asked her to read it one more time I told her that the boy is telling the story, so that every time she thinks she should say *he* she should say *I--I fell down*, not *he fell down*. She understood that, and the final time she read it to me, the words she read were very close to the text. She said, "I can read this now!" And she left me happier than I'd seen her all year.

Immediately afterwards, I gave the Breakthrough Book to Liz and asked her to work with the kids who I've not put into the Lippincott program. I suggested she get them to pretend to read the book first, then read it to them several times, and finally, have them read it back. I guess the next step is word cards, but I'm not sure how.

Today I taped Sally reading. She had memorized most of *I Fell Down*. At the end of the book, the song "Happy Birthday to You" appears. We sang it while Sally pointed to each word, at my request. Although she knows the word "to," she never hit it corresponding to when we sang it.

I've noticed a few other things about her. She didn't want to stay with me instead of going to art. She didn't want to read to me. But she seemed to enjoy it.

As for Foster, last week I learned that he has *Little Black, A Pony* (or *Joins the Circus*) at home, and that he'd memorized quite a bit of it. He volunteered this information. I think for him, as well as for Sally, memorizing and pointing will get them to understand at least a part of reading. It will bring the spoken word and the text together.

Rhoda does a lot with memorizing songs and Nursery Rhymes, and I'd like to try more of that, too.

I started to read *The Littles*. They are a family of six-inch-tall people with tails who live in the walls of a house owned by the Bigg family. Foster wondered why they have tails and so do I. I think it's a good choice to read right now because we're working on small things and because this book has lots of sequels which some of the better readers might be interested in trying out independently.

We went to visit the trees today. It's so warm for January. It seems we adopted another tree on the way--the magnolia near the climber.

We hadn't really talked too much about the magnolia tree before. The children noticed its color (*like snow, white like the birch, not like a regular tree, greenish*) and its shape (one trunk at the bottom which quickly divides into three). They noticed that it has no leaves but that it does have buds (*buds, nuts, things sticking up from the roots*). They noticed holes where branches had fallen off: *The roots look like monster claws.*

I love the magnolia and have noticed that the buds are swelling. I don't know if they're early or not. I can hardly control my excitement thinking about going out to see the trees in the spring. I'm wondering if I should do my usual February bit of bringing budding twigs to school or if I should just let the kids be surprised outside. I'll have to talk to other teachers about this.

We looked at Henry's tree. There were many more images in the children's remarks this time than before, especially of monsters: *When the wind blows the branches, it looks like a monster coming to get you, like fingers grabbing or holding you. It looks like an ice cream cone because it's round at the top like an ice cream cone. The trunk is like the cone. It looks like a big flower.*

This time the children noticed much more about the form of the tree--the thick trunk and thinner branches at the top. *How come it's fat* and *thin?* They commented on what seemed like *every* dried leaf left on the tree, though at first they had said there were no leaves. *It's touching Henry's house. It has holes in it. There are seeds on top.*

The beech had more *seeds* on top. There are lots of places where branches have been cut off. The children noticed that the branches bend downwards. They had images here, too, of hands coming to grab you. They saw lots of cracks on the trunk, and Leonard said, "How come those cracks are there?" I asked the children what they thought: *It's old. It's getting new skin. The skin came off. It's coming off.* I said that I didn't know.

Sometimes the children get confused between questions and statements. Sometimes I limit comments to questions. Today when we were looking at the beech, I said, "Does anyone have any *questions*?" Leonard said, "I do," and proceeded to describe something. I said, "What you told us was very interesting, but it wasn't a

question. When you want to find out about something, when there's something you don't know but want to know, then you ask a question. Is there anything you would like to know about this tree?" Then he asked the question about the cracks which, of course, I could not answer.

January 28. My Sustained Reading Time is not silent because the children help each other so much when they read together. I would like to have a *real* Sustained Silent Reading time (SSR), but it would have to be separate from this. I'm not willing to take away the help that the children give one another as beginning readers. So many have begun by reading with friends: Benjamin helped Paul, Maria helped Anita, Bethann helped Atiya, Leonard helped Henry, Jimmy helped William, William helped Ali.

Whenever a kid is on the brink of reading or is reading slowly, I suggest he or she read with someone. That usually pulls the child into reading. With my limited time (a conference with each child every other week), I *need* the kids to teach each other. I've also noticed that some kids are more relaxed with friends than with me. Still, I'd also like an SSR. Which brings me back to Sally.

Today Sally and Felicia sat across from me at Sustained Reading Time. Sally brought *I Fell Down* and she told Felicia she would teach her to read it. Felicia has never seen the book before and Sally has read it often during the last few days. She has memorized the words, yet remembers only a few out of context. Sally said, "I'll hold the book and point to the words for you."

I watched as she pointed to each word, asked Felicia the sound it starts with, gave her the word after waiting, when she didn't know it, praised her when she got it right. When Felicia came to the word *up* and was stuck, Sally said, "Come on, what is the sound of *u*?" Felicia said, "Yuh." Sally said, "No, it's *uh*. The word is *up*. You've seen it before." I was amazed at how much of the teacher Sally had absorbed.

From *I Fell Down*, they went to *A Pig Can Jig*, which Felicia can read and Sally can't. Sally continued to point to the words. When they got to "I ran the tan van," Sally said, "That can't be right. It doesn't make sense." I explained that tan is a color--light brown, and that a van is a truck. Then I said, "It means that I drove a light brown truck." "Oh," was Sally's reply.

From that SRA book, they went to *Run and Play*, a Bank Street supplementary pre-primer. Sally has been working on it, but continues to forget the exact words, though she *always* gets the meaning of the story. When Felicia said, "The boys *wake* up (instead of are up)" Sally said, "No, *are* up." Yet when she reads it, she always makes the same mistake.

Finally, they got Felicia's library book, which neither can read. Sally's directions were, "If it's too hard, you don't have to read it. Tell me about the

pictures." I told Sally a secret in her ear--that she could say, "You can pretend to read it."

I was so impressed with Sally's confidence and ability as a teacher. And I was pleased that she was imitating my most supportive ways. (I also noticed that she continues to think *h* is *f*.) And when Felicia said one of the words couldn't be *hurt* because it started with *d*, and *hurt* doesn't, Sally was a little embarrassed. She looked at me, then away.

I just kept telling her how well she is reading, and what a fine teacher she is. It was thrilling.

I read *People* by Peter Spier. It is a book about differences among all the people on earth: their shapes, eyes, hair, foods, clothes, houses, interests, games, holidays, alphabets. I paraphrased some of it and the children enjoyed it. It says at the beginning that all people start as babies, and are small; at the end, it says that all people die. And it says that it would be a boring world if everyone looked the same, ate the same foods, and did the same things.

Last Friday, when all the visitors were in my room, we had two Project Times. I introduced them with little fanfare, thinking to myself that I could manage an integrated day with this class. I was not especially happy with the feeling I had at the end of that day, because I knew that the kids thought of it as play and, to many of them, play is not really something they should be doing in school. It doesn't fit the archetype. Each day since then, they've been asking me if they will have two Project Times, and I've not allowed it; I'm really not happy with two Project Times. Yet I don't like isolated reading, writing, and math into separate times when the children then forget about these at Project Time. Only a few children ever draw/write or work on math and science projects then.

I was once again annoyed about the books--this time because the craft books (marked with red and turquoise tape) were thrown on any old shelf. So I took the books out and showed the children the craft and "how-to-do-it" books. Some titles are: *Egg Carton Critters*, *Valentine Projects*, *Crazy Cut-Outs*, etc. Many children planned to use them tomorrow. Is *this* (using craft books) the integration of reading and art at Project Time?

January 29. The children followed through on their plans. About 10 worked on making things and used the craft books as a start. Four people worked on *Crazy* or *Spooky Cut-Outs*--a collection of toys they can cut out of the book, fold and tape, and which move and/or pop up.

Five children worked on Valentine projects. I was not yet prepared to start the children on Valentine things, but they attacked them with a vengeance, spurred on by yesterday's display of the book *Things to Make and Do For Valentine's Day*. Felicia, Sally, Pam, Anita, Susan, and Ben worked on this. So, I got out my precious red paper, and they started cutting. I had my usual

anxiety attack about wasting paper, and warned them to cut big hearts from big paper, and small hearts from scraps. It didn't matter. They *never* listen.

January 30. Tami and Jill are paper sculptors, and it took them many pieces and tries to get the right kind of valentine basket and valentine house out of paper. Once again I told the children they would have to use up the small pieces before taking any larger ones. (I think it's a losing battle.)

Ben asked if they would be able to take the valentines home. (He's afraid I won't give them back, I know. I have a bad reputation.) I told him that it was a long time until Valentine's Day but, of course, they need to go home. I'd just keep them safe on the wall until then.

February 2. The Custodial Workers Union, 1201, has gone out on strike. It's hard to believe that union members would urge members of other unions to cross their picket line, but that's what they did with teachers. The children were given the day off and it would be nice if the Principal didn't keep interrupting us for workshops and meetings and let us work by ourselves. It's so frustrating! Here's some time we could use to make up for the planning days we missed at the beginning of the year because of *our* strike, and the Superintendent of Schools forces principals to talk to us about Special Education again, or about fire safety. I feel badly for the people who have to do presentations, because *no one* wants to listen to them. The teachers end up directing their anger at the Principal, towards their colleagues, the speakers.

February 3. After wasting lots of time trying to convince the Principal that (a) we should be allowed to work in our rooms and/or make things for our rooms, and (b) any Staff Review session that a group of us held should be voluntary, he cancelled all plans for workshops, and we got to work in our rooms. He had to go to a meeting.

I finally brought all my old books from home into school. They've been sitting in my son Saul's room since the summer. They're books that belonged to my kids, and I found myself crying occasionally, as I went through them, remembering different experiences we'd had with them. I sorted them into piles--easy readers, science, biography, chapter books, teacher books, books to give to the third and fourth grades, worn-out books to give to a family. The books I can't decide about are collections of stories that are in rather raggedy condition, but which are probably quite nice. I've never read them to the children, and probably never will. What should I do? Save them? I've never even put my paperbacks out, and my kids *still* have plenty to read. But I'm getting ready to let them circulate without worrying about them tearing.

Today Barbara Ruth said that she's going to get rid of lots of her books because the kids don't read them. I feel that the kids *do* need to be told (through coding and then explanation of the coding) what's available to them. But after all is said and done, is there such a thing as too many books?

Ginny Bommentre, the teacher in 212, and I are talking about a common library in room 213, which is a space we share. I'm looking forward to that. I'll probably keep my easy readers separate, but will put most science, craft, biographies, and chapter books there. We'll have to decide exactly where to put the shelves.

February 6. We had practically the whole life cycle today. Theresa (Robbie's mom) has decided that she would like to work in the class and hopes to come once a week with Catherine, her three-month-old baby. Since she lives in the northeast section of Philadelphia and not here in Germantown, she must take two buses to get here. She's an energetic woman, and I'm delighted, especially because I love when the children get to observe a baby over time. Of course, I don't mind her help either.

We all sat in a circle and baby Catherine was in it too, sitting on her infant seat. I asked the children to watch her quietly for a moment and then, if anyone had anything to say, he or she could. Mark wanted to ask questions, and I promised him there would be time for that after lunch. The children described what she was wearing, her size, how small everything about her is (ears, eyes, nose, fingers), the movement her hands and feet were making, her face as she started to cry.

Robbie, her brother, needed very badly to be next to her, and he kept touching her face, or leaning in front of her, making it difficult for the children to see her. He also began to call her names and giggled all the while, and his mother was quite embarrassed.

When we got back from lunch, we again sat in a circle and I invited the children to ask questions. At first, Theresa and I shared explanations. *How was she born?....But how does she get born?....How does the baby get out?....Where is that birth canal?*

How does the baby get hair? How does hair grow? We had a long discussion about differences in hair color, texture, and length. *How does the baby grow after it's born?* I asked if anyone knew. The children seemed satisfied with their own answers and so I continued in this way, with an occasional comment by Theresa or me. I watched to see if their own answers seemed to satisfy them. If no further questions arose, I let the matter stand.

What is your belly button? I reminded them (after a long explanation about the umbilical cord) that when the baby is inside its mother, it doesn't really eat the oranges its mother eats. After the mother chews the oranges, they go to her stomach, and they don't get dumped on the baby in her uterus.

What is pee? How does it get yellow? What is poop? I think they just loved saying the words, but we discussed these questions anyway. *What makes you sneeze, cough, sniff?* Catherine's sneeze inspired this question. *How come men don't have babies?* Mark complained that it's not fair. I assured them that men help. I asked, "How can you tell if a baby is a boy or a girl?" *By the hair....By the clothes color....Ask its mother....* But Atiya knew and shyly explained.

I reminded the children that they could find many of the answers to their questions in many of the books in our classroom library. I reminded them of Joe Kaufman's book, *How We Are Born, How We Grow, How Our Bodies Work and How We Learn*, which many of them already knew.

Later in the afternoon, the children had Project Time. Atiya had been sick last week with scarlet fever, and there was no school for four more days this week, so she had trouble returning. She was cranky all day, and sucked her thumb a lot. I suggested she play with the mice to take her mind off herself, and work with Belinda and Jane.

It was a good recommendation. She relaxed and smiled and worked well. The three built a little maze of blocks. Suddenly, Atiya came to me quite upset, but not crying. "A block fell on a mouse and it's bleeding and it's hurt." Belinda said, "It's not dead. Its tail moved." I quickly went to the table and saw the mouse lying on its back, with a bloody nose. It was clearly dead. I said, "I think the mouse is dead. We should watch it for a few minutes to make sure."

Those who knew about it stood silently around, watching. There were about 10 kids; others who had heard the news kept coming over, saying, "Eeew," and going away. A few children said, "Can I touch it?" and they gingerly touched with their index finger.

Atiya was obviously upset, but she was not crying. As the children began to talk, however, she began to cry.

Belinda (who had cared for the mice during the school closing, and who had just named them): "That was my favorite. I named the mice, you know. Its name was Freddy." (Tears from Atiya)

Neal: "Someone said Atiya killed a mouse." (Sobs from Atiya)

Jane: "I liked that one the best because he was a different color from the other two." (Hysterical sobbing from Atiya.)

I hugged Atiya, who was, by this time sobbing uncontrollably. I said, very loudly, "A mouse died because a block fell on it. Atiya did *not* kill it. An accident happened." What had happened was something I had feared. The children enjoy making mazes and tunnels with the larger blocks, which weigh about a pound. I try to watch that the structures are not too tall, but this time I slipped up. Atiya had built a side only two blocks high,

like this , but it was unstable, and the top blocks fell after her body accidently brushed against them.

I asked Atiya what I should do with the mouse. (I'm not a big one for animal funerals.) She said, "Put it in a jar and let us look at it. Then when it starts to stink, bury it." I asked her if that was what Mrs. Perlmutter had done, and she said, "Yes. And she put it into a milk carton before she buried it. It was a dead baby chick." We found a jar in the closet and put it with the mouse on the display table.

After clean-up I asked the children to sit in a circle, with Atiya close to me where I could hug her and she could rest her head on my knee. Once again, I explained what had happened, and how badly Atiya felt. She cried.

Then I read the book *A Dead Bird*, by Margaret Wise Brown, in which the children find a bird, have a funeral, bury it, and then forget it. I cried a little, as did Jane and Belinda.

When I had finished, it was almost time to leave. The children prepared for dismissal, and I noticed Atiya standing at the table with the jar in her hand, looking intently at the dead mouse. It was almost as if she were saying goodbye. I walked over to her and asked her if she would like me to keep it, or if I should bury it over the weekend. She asked me to bury it over the weekend.

February 9. Jimmy brought in some Black History cards, and I wanted to make time to talk about them. The cards have a drawing of a famous person on the front, and a description of what the person did on the back. Once again, the children amaze me with their ability to sit and listen quietly to ideas that are *very* difficult. They *are* interesting, but even half the cards were a lot of cards. My assistant, Elizabeth, showed them to the children, and paraphrased the descriptions in a most humorous, relaxed, and understandable way. Jim picked the cards and handed them to her. I learned a lot and enjoyed hearing her. (It's not often that I give up control like that, and feel comfortable doing it.) Occasionally I added some facts I knew.

I started reading *The Littles*. As much as possible, I'm trying to point out differences in scale as I read the book. For example, the Littles are a bit taller than a mouse. One of them could be stepped on by a human foot.

Many of the children are bringing miniatures for the Paper Bag Guessing Game and are then placing them on the "Teeny Tiny Table." The display table and the game have become connected through this year.

I put *my* little things out--doll house dice, teeny tiny metal animals, my small fairy tale books, my bird and other animal skulls. Ginny lent me some miniatures. I really could get into this.

February 10. We visited the trees. The children noticed that the buds are becoming prominent. More kids are calling them buds now. When I asked if anything had changed, the children said that the tree is larger.

I asked them to think about this: If we wanted to measure the tree, and if we started by standing Susan next to the bottom of it and put a child on her shoulders, and a child on *that* person's shoulders, and so on, how many children would it take to reach the top of the tree? The question inspired many guesses and lots of excitement.

When we got back to the room, I said, "You all guessed how many children are as tall as our tree. Now, for homework I want you to think of a way that we could measure how tall the tree is--the height of the tree. You can explain it in words or in pictures. But you have to figure out how to do it. Make up a way by yourself. Use your imagination."

When I notice that the children are running around instead of cleaning up (or standing in little groups talking, or having trouble pulling themselves away from their work), I simply say, "Everyone come and sit on the rug. No, don't clean up. Just stop and sit on the rug."

We discuss things about clean-up....

February 14. Saturday is Susan B. Anthony's birthday. How I hate to talk about someone famous with no picture. I forgot to wear my T-shirt. I had only that dollar coin I keep thinking is a quarter. Anyway, I told the children this story:

About 125 years ago there were black and white people who were against slavery of all kinds. The same people believed that, in many ways, women, as well as blacks, were slaves. Frederick Douglass felt that way. Sojourner Truth, a black woman, felt that way. Did you ever hear of Harriet Tubman? She felt that way. There were many white women and men who also believed that all people--men and women, black and white--are equal.

At the same time that black people were slaves, women weren't allowed to vote for president or mayor or anyone. They weren't allowed to own a house. They had to do whatever their husbands or fathers or brothers told them to do.

Tomorrow people honor Susan B. Anthony because it's the anniversary of her birth. (Do you remember that a month ago we honored Martin Luther King?) She tried to go against one of the bad laws which said that women couldn't vote. One election day, she marched right to the voting place and voted, even though she knew she would get arrested if she did. So she was the first woman in the United States to vote, and she got arrested for doing it. It took a long time after that until women were allowed to vote.

Telling this story to the children always reminds me of Manuel, who had come from Chile and who was just learning

English. In Spanish, the sound of *b* is very close to our *v*. At the end of the day I said to the children, "Now what did Susan B. Anthony do?" Manuel raised his hand and I called on him, pleased that he would remember. "She helped them get on the boat," he said. He'd mixed her up with Rosa Parks and the bus.

Valentine's Day is not a holiday I love. All those cards that mean nothing, since everyone gets one and you don't even try to get one that suits the persons you're sending them to. I made my usual doily with heart for each child. I'd rather send them home by mail, with a note saying, "Dear _____, I love you. If you would like to, write me a letter and I'll write back to you. I love to get letters. Happy Valentine's Day. Love, Ms. Strieb." I used to do it when I had less than 30 children, but now it's impossible.

Paul brought cookies and Susan brought pretzels. Not having to cook saved the day. But there was no heart candy at the supermarket; no sweet messages. I'm glad this difficult week is over.

February 16. Belinda came in and said she'd had a terrible dream last night. Her babysitter had watched *Charlie's Angels* on television, and it scared her. I'd seen the show and knew what she was talking about. Some other children heard her talking, and began to talk about their nightmares. I realized that we'd have to talk about this (and besides, I know from past experience that the kids' scary dreams written down make a *great* class book; I'd been wishing to do it with this class), so sitting in a circle, I asked if anyone had ever had a scary dream or nightmare.

It was clear some of the children were uncomfortable talking about their dreams: *When I talk about it, it scares me again*. Belinda said what I was about to say, "My mom read in this book, *Child Behavior*, or something like that, that you should talk about your dreams. It will make you not so scared." "Well, that's just how *I* feel about it, Belinda. But my son Max once had a bad dream about a bear, and he refused to talk about it." I asked the children to raise their hands if they wanted to speak; told them that everyone would not have a turn; and if they did not want to, I would not force them.

Isaac dreamed he walked into a beehive. Bethann dreamed about a scary movie. Sally dreamed about a man without a head. Felicia dreamed she got lost outside in the rain. I dreamed I was riding in a car with my mother, who was driving too fast. The car went off the road and I felt myself falling. I told my mother I loved her. I woke up crying. The children loved hearing each others' dreams, and especially mine.

When they seemed to be getting restless (and when it was clear I could not test today with only 25 children), I asked them to draw and write about their dreams, not in their writing books, but on a separate piece of paper. I said I would type their dreams and put them

into a book. About 15 children did it. I wrote my dream, and while I illustrated many children watched.

I've collected a variety of twigs from bushes and trees in the neighborhood: forsythia, honeysuckle bush, and dogwood. The first thing I did today was to pass one twig around the circle and ask the children to describe it: *It has little flowers coming out....It is brown.... It has bumps on it....I see seeds....It is smooth in some places with little bumps....On the bottom it's kind of straight....Branches are sticking up....It's big....There are little buds on it....One bud came off....The skinny branches stick up....It is pointing on top of the buds ....Some branches are big, some are short....It is fat down on the bottom....It is half green and half brown.... It comes from a tree....The little branches are skinny ....Some branches have two buds at the top, some have one.*

I asked the children to look closely at the tips of the twig and to describe what they were calling buds, as we passed it around again: *They are oval-shaped with points....There are two at the end of each branch....They are green and brown with little points on top....There is a little bit of purple....They are little....They are soft....They kind of look like baby pine cones....There are points at the top....It looks like skin's around it ....It looks like they have X's on it....It looks like a flower that didn't open....It looks like tiny acorns at the bottom....It's like a piece of turtle....It's a little bit red....There are small, little triangles on it ....The buds are green and red.*

I put the twigs in water in vases to force the buds open and I asked the children to watch them because the twigs would be changing. I'd had a little debate with myself about just letting the children see the trees and bushes bloom outside, without a classroom preview. But I need some color inside, and some life to overcome the drabness of this windowless classroom.

I'd like to do some sorting activities with the twigs before the buds open. I hope I can find the time.

February 17. During Project Time, I set up the typewriter and began to type the dreams. When I said, "Anyone who wants to watch me type may come here," no one came. But when I asked individual children if they wished to see their stories typed, each child came to watch. Jane watched several after her turn. A few children asked me to read theirs back to them.

This writing of stories outside of the writing books started because I had taken the writing books home to type, and I gave the children paper to write on. The number who did this was rather small, and I was feeling badly that so far this year I'd not made many books of their stories. So I felt that if I typed them right away and put them in plastic and into a binder as Jessica Howard does at Prospect, untyped stories wouldn't pile up and make me feel guilty. It's worked quite well.

Today I finished reading *Mouse Tales* by Arnold Lobel, to the children. It has some *really* funny stories and both the children and I laughed as I read them.

There was a tall mouse and a short mouse. The tall mouse said hello to the birds; the short mouse said hello to the bugs. "Why?" I asked. The tall mouse said hello to the flowers, the short mouse, to the roots. "Why?" I was fascinated by which children were able to verbalize a sensible reason. Most mentioned the tall mouse being high. Only Diana used the word *size*, saying, "The small mouse is about the same size as the roots. The tall mouse is about the size of the flowers."

Ben, who doesn't often express his likes, said, "Will you read the last story?" That was his way of telling me he likes the book.

When I finished the book, I said, "And your homework for tonight will be to tell your own Mouse Tale. You don't have to write it. But you must make one up. You may draw a picture of it. You may say the words to someone and ask them to write them down for you. Or you may write it yourself." (Belinda said, "My mom will tell me I can write it myself.") "But I want it to be *your* story, not your parent's."

I gave the small pieces of paper that Ben's mom had given me--cut-offs from a card company--to the children telling them they could illustrate their stories on this paper and that I'd make a book for the class. We're all excited. I'll have to write my own Mouse Tale.

At Project Time I told the children they could make their own books with the little paper. About eight kids did, and I'm happy that they're finally making books. I've been wanting to set up a well-organized writing corner with all kinds of books, needles and thread, tape, covers, etc., but I never seem to get around to it. So I'll just encourage them to go ahead until I do.

February 18. We made cookies--or I should say, my assistant and the children did. I had pre-measured the ingredients at home because I thought we'd make them on Valentine's Day and when I didn't have to cook with the children, I put the ingredients away until yesterday.

After the ingredients were mixed, I lined up rows of cookies on the first cookie sheet. We were in such a rush to get to the library and to get the cookies into the oven that I did it myself rather than have the children do it, as I usually do. My questioning went like this:

How many rows of cookies?....How many cookies in each row?....How many cookies are in four rows of five? Try to guess before you count....We need 34 cookies. Do we have enough on this cookie sheet? How many more do we need?....We have 34 people, and I want to give each person two cookies. How many cookies do we need?....If I put five rows of five cookies on the cookie sheet, how many cookies will I have?....How many on two cookie sheets with five rows of five?

I did it and we counted. During all of this, I was putting cookies on the cookie sheet and was surprised to see that the kids stood quietly and participated in the question-answer.

I asked the children to put their books away and sit on the rug. I was still listening to a child read, and the children came to the rug in groups. Maria sat in a seat set up by the children for me, and she began to be the teacher. She tried to get the children quiet, to sit down, and to stop hanging on each others' backs. I watched as she ran into terrible trouble, and as Atiya, especially, and a few other children tried to take over as teacher. The children kept looking at me to see what my reaction would be, but I kept my eyes on Maria. As more children sat on the rug, I joined them.

After about five minutes of Maria's trying to settle everyone, I finally got up from the floor and stood next to her, and everyone got quiet....

February 19. Homework for Monday was to write a long list of Castle and Fairy Tale words. Once again, I am amazed at the fullness of these lists. I also notice some children *pass* the first time. But, after hearing other children's words, think of their own and make contributions.

Many of the black children gave the names of fairy tales, rather than words having to do with castles. I'm sorry I lumped the two themes; I figured some kids might have trouble with castles, so I broadened it a little. It was the white kids who seemed to have talked about knights, weapons, and castles.

Today I prepared the children for my absence tomorrow. Since I had a chance to talk to the sub, and she asked me to leave scripted lesson plans that she'd try to follow, I told the children what the schedule might be and why. I spoke to the children who are often mischievous (Leonard and Reggie). I told them I expected good behavior, and listed some of the things they must not do (thus reminding them exactly what they could do to be bad?).

Reggie has been bothering children--flying his hands in their faces, kissing some of the girls, taking peoples' seats, tripping people. I've finally had to tell him *very bluntly*, "People want to like you. They really are trying to like you. You're making it hard for them to like you. You keep kissing, teasing, and hitting. They tell you to stop, and you won't stop. Do you want people to like you?" "Yes (tears)." "Well, then do things that will make people like you."

And to the class I said, "Reggie needs your help. If he bothers you and won't stop, please say to him, 'Reggie, I want to like you. Help me to like you.'"

I've again passed around the twig we had looked at the other day. The buds are swollen now and the leaves are showing but are not open. I wish I'd had time to pass around several different kinds of branches. I hope

I get to do it. I would also like to sort twigs, but there doesn't seem to be time.

The children talked about how the buds had changed, especially in size, color, and shape. They talked in detail about the location of the small green leaves, and what they thought might happen next. They said the buds reminded them of artichokes or little pine cones. Some children called the buds *seeds*.

February 23. We sat in a circle first thing this morning because I wanted to talk about my trip. Over the weekend I had attended the yearly meeting of the North Dakota Study Group at Wingspread near Racine, Wisconsin.

A child asked, "Were you in the airport?" I told them about our adventures with the fogged-in airport in Detroit and that we had to take two planes instead of one. I showed them a postcard with an aerial view of Wingspread, a building that was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, and told them about it.

It's disappointing to come back and find paper all over the floor, blocks in a disorderly mess, books all around. I told the kids and, of course, they blamed the substitute for not letting them finish cleaning.

At Wingspread, I saw a film of Leslie Stein's class at Central Park East School, *We All Know Why We're Here*. Lots in it for me to think about. Today at Sustained Reading time I decided to try to do what Leslie does--have everyone, including me, sit in the large, open space on the rug with a book. It actually kept the children much quieter and calmer. Those who work individually with Liz and those who find children reading aloud distracting (about four) were allowed to sit at the table. I'm interested to see if this will cut down on the book-changing and walking around....

February 24. We sat in a circle. I gave the children a twig each and asked them to watch in silence. Each child was to decide if the twig should stay alone or be grouped with others, then put it on the floor. I love this quiet attribute game. There's no right or wrong answer, and I told the children this. When all the twigs were on the floor, I asked the children to describe each set. Then I asked three children if they would like to make any changes. The child who made changes talked about the reasons for the change. Sometimes I'd restate what the children observed, especially when they noticed more than one attribute in the same object. I've said nothing about overlap yet.

After lunch the children were wild. There were two problems: kissing and name-calling. Atiya starts the kissing and it makes the boys run around wildly. I ask, "Is it okay to kiss? Friends kiss. When I see a friend I haven't seen in a long time, we kiss. Sometimes girls kiss girls and boys kiss boys. It doesn't mean you are in love." They can't even hear it. They prefer to be silly about it.

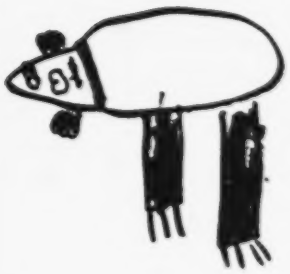
I don't know exactly what happened, but there was some name-calling outside between Maria and Tami. It was a huge fight, which pitted girls in our class against one another, and which brought Tami's brother and Maria's aunt into the battle. Once again, I said, "Sticks and stones will break my bones, but names will never hurt me (even though it isn't true.) And--keep it inside our room. You don't need anyone bigger to solve your problems."

Belinda is working so hard on punctuation in her writing. It's really interesting to see her fine sense of conventions: abbreviations, quotation marks, periods, capitals, and commas.

The math workbook started it. The children enjoyed filling out the graphs so much that I told them they could do their own surveys. Paul did it first. Then, as other children saw him do it, they asked if they could. Some questions: What is your favorite candy bar, fruit, soda, football team?

Enrico was very anxious to do a survey. His question: What is your favorite animal in the classroom: mice, hamster, guinea pig, rabbit? It was hard for him to say: "What animal do you like best?" in English. I said it in Spanish, and he said it in Spanish, but word order is difficult. Nevertheless, he surveyed everyone.

He is now telling stories in English to go with his drawings. He is speaking to me in English. It's amazing. I make a big fuss about his English, but I also say, "You are really luckier than most of us because you can speak two languages--English and Spanish." Each time I teach a non-English-speaking child, they become facile at about the same time of the year.



It helps to come to school early. It would be nice to set up a pre-school schedule for myself for fixing paints and setting things out. But I can't seem to do it often. I wake up slowly and seem to need to piddle around the house. How much better and more organized and relaxed the day is when I set things out ahead of time. Then I don't have to worry about materials being ready, and about making kids wait to go to projects until I finish checking stories.

February 25. Rita Carney raised questions when we talked on the phone last night: Do we at Kelly have high enough standards? Do we expect enough from the kids? What happens when they leave us after fourth grade? What about the larger world? Other schools? These are questions we all ask ourselves. Her questions were prompted by her daughter's difficulties with math when she changed to a suburban school. She was tops in Philadelphia, but those schools go "by the book," "by the grade." In fourth grade, you do "the fourth grade math book." You get lots of practice, not just the concept.

She also thought about Ben's older brother, Brian, who writes wonderful stories but whose work is being panned at Fitler (a "back-to-basics" school) because of

his phonetic spelling. "We made him aware of his spelling, but we really didn't force him to change. Is that right?"

It's a shame that when we get into this frame of mind (all of us conscientious teachers), we *forget about* all the good things we do. Yet I know I could do a much better job teaching math and spelling to the kids than I do now.

We went outside to visit the trees on this very windy day. The children noticed that the top of the magnolia tree moved but not the trunk. Some of the bigger branches moved. When the smaller twigs on top moved, the spaces between them vanished and it looked like one big clump. I pointed to some mulberry bushes which were swaying from the ground to the top. It was a good contrast to the motion of the magnolia tree.

The buds at the top of Henry's tree are quite swollen. "There are no leaves on it," Diana said. I asked if it ever had had leaves. She said, "A long time ago." The motion of the maple tree was much grander than that of the magnolia. Bethann said that it was "like that thing on the grandfather's clock that goes back-and-forth, back-and-forth." She rocked her whole body as she said this. I asked the children if they could put their arms up and move like Henry's tree in the wind. (This tree is especially like a person with up-raised arms.) Jimmy even moved his fingers like the twigs.

At that moment a strong wind came and blew the leaves on the lawn near the building into an upward spiral. The children screeched with delight! They watched the leaves until they had stopped flying.

Then I directed their attention to the beech tree: *The buds stick out....The nest is still there....There are no leaves....The top looks like a wheat field.... There's a kind of separation at the top and the branches go in two directions....The trunk is big and doesn't move, but the smaller branches and twigs move up and down and a little around.*

Suddenly the wind near the ground started again and the leaves were blown from in front of the school, across our path, to the street. Again there were gales of laughter: *It looks like a monster (pointing to the tree) is after them and they're running away....It looks like they're scared of the monster....They're going to recess ....They're running....They're racing....They were playing--playing tag.*

The children watched and laughed as the wind grew stronger. Finally they began running around like the leaves. They ran to the pile of leaves and began throwing them up in the air.

On the way into the building Susan said, in her usual quiet and secretive way, "How come this tree and the one in front of the school both have seeds on them?" I said, "What do you think will happen?" She said, "Will leaves come out?" "We'll have to wait and see."

We got into the building with bright eyes, cheeks tinged with pink, messed-up hair, breathless. Mark said, "I like to be outside in any kind of weather."

February 26. Last night's homework: "Write a list of words that make you think of school." As usual, I wrote the words on the board as they said them. The words were grouped around teachers' names, objects and activities in the room, and feeling words--nice feelings.

I've noticed for a long time that when Robbie chooses an activity, he doesn't stick with it. He comes to me three or four times during Project Time (9:30 to 10:30) to ask if he can change his choice. He does spend long periods of time with Lego, colored blocks and cars, and his arithmetic workbook. If none of these activities is available, he seems especially lost.

Today I gave him a project to work on. He was to choose one twig and draw it. He could use pencil and crayon. I told him that when he was finished I should be able to look at his drawing and pick the twig he drew out of the vase. At first he balked but together we looked at the twig and talked about it. Robbie drew it and I was able to recognize the one he'd chosen (the easiest one--the one with no prominent or opening buds). But then he asked if he could do another, then another. I took out the binocular microscope and set it up near the twigs. Then I set up a twig on the stage and looked in. How I love to use that thing. Robbie looked in and became excited. "Look, the twig looks like a log when you look through the microscope!" It did. Other children looked at that twig, at tiny leaves, buds, and especially at the pussy willows. I showed the class Robbie's drawings during the discussion after Project Time.

There's been a general feeling of boredom in the room. The children work for a while at a choice and then wander. They come to me and ask if they can change their choices. They sometimes work on three, four things a day. My goal has always been for them to sustain an activity--to try to work not only through the entire Project Time, but also for several days in a row.

Tied in with this is the issue of workbooks and (of course) Lego. Since I've put Lego away for a while, I've noticed other activities that seem to take its place. Colored blocks get sustained interest--all morning and several days running. Math workbooks do, too. In fact, Jimmy, Robbie, William, Reggie, and Leonard seem to be in a race to finish their books. Jim and Robbie are good in arithmetic and they love it. And if I'd let them, they'd work on it every day, all day (they have for the past two weeks). However, both Lego and workbooks seem to be easy choices. They provide a structure in which no chances need to be taken. If a child is especially good in arithmetic, then there's not even room for making mistakes. It doesn't bother me if kids draw every day or paint or work with clay every day. Even blocks and

colored blocks are fine. But I feel uneasy with Lego and math workbooks every day.

I told the children, during a discussion today, how upset I was that they seemed to be bored. I told them that there are lots of materials in the room and in the closet. If they want something new, they should ask for it. If there was something they enjoyed working on last year, and would like to do again, they should tell me, and I would try to help them do it.

Jimmy said he'd like to learn about the body. (He may live to be sorry he ever said that.) I promised that I'd help him do that. Would he like to trace around his body onto a large piece of paper, then draw bones on it; and on another--organs? Lots of children got excited by the suggestion.

Mark said, "If you could just put everything you have on a list, then we'd know exactly what we could do." Once again, how reasonable he is. I somehow thought I did that with the sign-up sheet, but I guess everything is not listed.

February 27. I didn't prepare the children or parents for the play at Annenberg Theater today--at least, not for the content. I talked about being quiet and seated in the theater, and they made it clear they knew that. Then I asked them about the difference between a play and a movie. It seems they have that straight, too, thanks to the *Wizard of Oz*, which our Children's Theater performed last year.

I was not feeling too happy about taking first-grade children to see a play about Teddy Roosevelt, so I felt that the less said about him, the better; the theater experience was the important thing. The children were able to tell the story when we returned to school.

I was very conscious of the all-white production. It really upsets me. I wrote a letter to Annenberg about their choice of plays, all-white children's theater productions in Philadelphia, the time (10 a.m. is too early), our difficulty with meeting deadlines and making arrangements.

March 2. A new month, a new week. Nothing could be as tired as last week was. I added some possibilities to the list at Project Time, those which were suggested at our discussion the other day. Some children traced the outlines of their bodies onto paper and painted them. A few have trouble with figure-ground. They paint the space between the arms and body. The clay was ready. I came in early and prepared for sewing. Ms. White worked with the children on egg carton creatures. It was a much better day. Just adding something new helps me to feel better.

I showed some of the work that was done today. Enrico was pleased to explain the details of his painting.

Belinda, Isaac, and Ali were quite excited because they thought the mice were mating. You could tell,

because there is a male and female (Belinda checked) and because they were kissing, hugging, and eating together. At first, Belinda thought the female was already pregnant, but then she changed her mind. I do hope the female has babies. And if she does, I'll know the number of days of gestation.

Pam brought a dead lizard which her grandmother had preserved at home in alcohol. We passed it around and the kids automatically began to describe it. (I hadn't planned for this--not enough time.) I'm not sure I'm too happy about them behaving like "robots"--always the same response to passing things around. But they seem to feel it's valuable to do, since many came over to see and privately told me what they saw, on the way down to science.

I asked the children, "How many children would have to stand on Susan's shoulders to reach from the floor to the ceiling?" Most said three or two-and-a-half, a number which included Susan. Then I asked them how we could figure it out. *Get a ladder and let people stand on the ladder from floor to ceiling....Take a piece of paper as long as the wall, lay it on the floor and trace around children as if they were standing....Make cut-outs of the children and tape them to the wall.*

Enrico said that his brother can hold him standing straight up on his shoulders. He described exactly how his brother lifts him, and promised that his brother would come to school tomorrow to show us. I love to hear Enrico speaking English now. He's not afraid to try, and his words come out exactly in the same order of Spanish--"Brother, my, can do that, brother big." He gets so animated. It's delightful. Fortunately, the children are not laughing.

I paraphrased a library book about what can be seen under a microscope. We talked about molds and plants and animals that people can't see with their eyes, but which they can see when they use special lenses in magnifying glasses or microscopes. I reminded them that Robbie's twig looked like a log under the microscope.

March 3. When Project Time was over I had a conversation with the children that I often have. I said, "First the bad things. We'll get them out of the way first. You didn't do such a great job of cleaning. What were you doing instead of cleaning?" Then, "Now the good things. You worked so well today." I named some of the people who were working with deep concentration, and told what they were doing.

I taped the painted cut-out bodies of Mark, Jimmy, and Sally to the wall, Mark on the bottom, Jimmy on his shoulders, and Sally on Jimmy's shoulders. I asked the children, "Is the wall across the room the same size as this wall? They were sure it was. I asked them how they could tell for sure without measuring. *Measure one wall with string and see if the string fits the other wall....*

Make more figures for the other wall....Count the cinderblocks on both walls.

Leonard asked if we could find out how many children it would take to go from our room to 211....

March 5. It snowed again, and it's March. It was a very wet snow with large flakes, and it made a beautiful show on the trees and bushes. I had to get the kids outside to see how our street had been transformed. Our neighborhood certainly is beautiful, especially when it first snows.

We looked at the trees and at the pattern of the snow on them. Then the kids ran to the poor little dogwood that is in front of the school. There had been two or three little dogwoods and some azalea bushes when the school first opened, but with no protection, they were either stolen or they died. In past years I'd seen kids pulling on the dogwoods and I'd felt that it was malicious vandalism. Now I watched, shocked, as my own children, the children who had been visiting three trees regularly, ran to the dogwood and began pulling on its branches, making it sway from side to side as if it were a rope and they were playing tug-of-war. I yelled for them to stop but they were so caught up in the motion that they couldn't hear. I ran over and got them to stop.

Then I said, in an angry way, "You're hurting this tree. Now tell me--is this tree dead?" Many children--Reggie, Ali, Robbie, and others, said, "Yes." When the "no's" came they changed their minds. I really didn't wait for discussion. I was so angry and upset that I told them, "This tree is not dead. It's winter time and there are no leaves on it. But if you shake it and break parts of it, it *will* die. Remember, just because it has no leaves, that doesn't mean it's dead. *It's not dead!*"

Everyone in the school needs to draw the kids' attention to trees if we want to have young trees growing around our school. We need to say the kinds of things I said to my children. Recently, the children have seen most of the large, old trees in the school yard being cut down. The newly-planted tree in the kindergarten yard is ailing, probably because of the abuse it gets. I've thought for many years about planting bulbs in front of the school but am afraid they will be pulled up. I've thought of an Arbor Day when each class plants a tree. Maybe I'll talk to the parents in the Home and School Association.

I'm having a tough time with Jimmy at SSR. He's carrying books around that he can't read. I know he needs them as a way of showing others what a good reader he is, but he's not reading as much as he needs to to become a better reader. I insisted today that he choose one of the books about *The Littles*. He chose *The Littles Go Exploring* and pretended to read it. He came to me and said, "Look, I'm on Chapter Two." I asked, "Well, what's Chapter One about? How does the story begin?" And, of

course, he could not tell me. I was furious. Naturally it doesn't help to force someone to read, but here again, how will he know he likes it unless he tries it? The other way, he's just avoiding reading. I made it very clear to him that I expect him to read and finish that book, and that periodically I would ask him what's happening.

I felt that the children needed a demonstration of how to make a pinch pot and a coil pot. I also showed them the beautiful houses of slabs that Leonard made, and asked Leonard to help those who wanted to learn how to do it.

March 6. Sustained Reading must be getting to me. I see lots of kids reading the Bank Street Primer *Around the City*. They don't know all the words, but they usually read together and they figure them out, or at least get the meaning of the stories. But when they are finished with that book, they want to go on to the next one, and it's really too hard. Many of the kids *can't* get meaning from that. But no matter how I try to suggest that they try other books at about Primer level (and I have many), they want to stick with the "series." They've seen other kids follow the progression, and they want to do the same. Should I let them do it and struggle?

I'm getting so sleepy in the afternoons. It's embarrassing to find my eyes closing when I hear kids read, or when I read a story to the class. (Does this happen to other teachers?) I'm thinking of changing story time to 10:30 (before lunch) when I'm not so sleepy. But then the kids often are.

March 9. I feel that children need lots of practice describing things. One of the ways I get them to do it is by passing an object around and asking them to say what they see; another is through the Paper Bag Guessing Game. Yesterday I sat down with the kids in a circle and said, "I'm going to describe something, but I'm not going to tell you what it is. If you don't guess what it is, I'll give you more clues. You have to guess what I'm describing."

I said, "I'm thinking of an object with two holes and two points, that is made of metal." I added the clue, "It opens and closes." Tonya guessed that it was a scissors. I also described a clock.

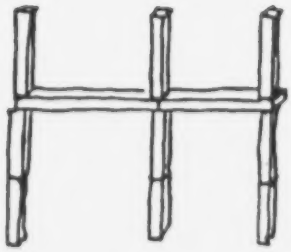
The children got excited and immediately asked if they could do some. There was no time so I gave it to them for homework: "Describe an object. Don't tell what it is. We will guess tomorrow."

I finished reading *The Mouse King*. They love stories about mice who outsmart bigger things (lions, armies).

March 10. Before lunch, the children began to read their descriptions. I thought we'd only do a few, but *everyone* wanted a turn, so we continued after lunch. There were

many good ideas and I think I shall type them and put them into a book. The range was from: *It is round. It is flat. It is silver. It has a face on one side and a bird on the back. It has lines on the edges* (a quarter), to: *You wash clothes in it.*

When children guessed immediately, I said, "You might have said this," and I described additional attributes.



They loved the riddle game and cheered when I gave it for homework again tonight. It would be fun to put some in a newsletter to send home.

Ali was building a very tall, delicate building in the blocks. From the start, I felt it was too delicate and worried that it might tip over. But though it was shaky, it stood as Ali built higher. Suddenly we heard a crash in the block-corner. Anita had knocked the building down. I waited, for Ali's temper can often overtake reason and it wouldn't be unlike him to pummel the person who knocked his building over. There was no blow--only the sound of Ali crying. I walked the 10 steps to the block area (many children ran over, too) and saw Ali bent over. I sat on the chair he had brought into the block corner and put him on my lap, hugging him, with his head on my shoulder. I rocked for a while, rubbing his back. Atiya was standing close and looking over my shoulder, tears in her eyes.

I asked how it happened. Anita had knocked it down by accident as she went to see Jill's building.

I don't know who started talking first but I began to explain to anyone who would listen, what a beautiful delicate structure Ali had built and how disappointing it is when someone knocks it down, even by accident. I could see that Anita was upset, too, so I called her over and put my arm around her, too. Atiya's eyes filled with tears. Mine did too. "I know Anita feels terrible. She would never want to do that. She probably feels a little like you did when the mouse died, Atiya."

We talked some more about the building and then I told Ali that if he wanted to try to build it again, he could. I asked Anita and a few others to help Ali by putting the blocks into neat piles on the side in order to clear a space for building.

He tried several times, but could not get the blocks steady, and each time they toppled, he began to cry. He was also upset because he could not remember how the other one was built.

I assured him that the new building did not have to look exactly like the old one, and I asked if he'd like to stay back in the room during art, so that he could build when it would be quiet. He asked if I would help.

He and I worked together. I put a board on the carpet to make a more secure surface. Then, after he'd built the first level of stilts, he said, "Can I make a second floor?" He really wanted the slats from Ben's building ("Ben got 'em all"), but was really happy when I found another board for the second floor....

March 11. On the way in this morning I noticed that the tree-trimmers were at work. Once I start something I can't stop. I picked up a large branch with unopened brownish-purple buds. I'd also been eyeing the trees on Hansberry Street that have blossoms on them already--beautiful chartreuse and red ones. I crossed the street to get a few twigs and the tree-trimmer came to help with his long pruning shears. "You're a teacher, aren't you?" I nodded. "What will you do with these?" I explained what we do and how important it is for children to be helped to observe the world around them from different vantage points, both far away and very close.

It's cold outside. How does the tree *know* when to bloom? How does it *know* that it's spring even though it doesn't feel like it to me?

We're going crazy! The clocks all over the school are broken and they keep announcing the time over the loudspeaker every 15 minutes. It's important, but terribly disruptive. I feel fragmented. The principal spent 20 minutes today on the loudspeaker (10 in the morning, 10 in the afternoon) telling us how we'll arrange the day.

Barbara Montoya, a member of the Teachers' Learning Coop, a bilingual teacher at Potter-Thomas elementary school, came to visit today with her student teacher. I had a *wonderful* time. I hope she did, too.

She worked quite a bit with Enrico and of course he loved it. (I've noticed though, that when he gets excited, he starts running around the room frantically.) She read him some Spanish stories; she read with him in English.

The best thing was that he agreed to teach the children a song. He chose it. So after lunch we all sat on the rug and Enrico and Barbara sat in chairs in front of the room.

Barbara began to speak to the children *in Spanish only*. She explained what she was going to do, and then she and Enrico sang (to the tune of *La Cucaracha*):

Mi escuelita. Mi escuelita.
Yo quiero con amor
Porque en ella, porque en ella
Yo mi apprendo mi leccion.

They taught that song to the children and then she sang two more that demanded participation from the children. One that involved animals and the sounds they make. If I'd been prepared, I would have had books ready, but I quickly found Animal Babies and Barbara had the pictures she needed. When she needed a dog and cat picture, Enrico ran over to the Big Books and got them. The whole experience was thrilling. Barbara promised to send some words to songs for me to teach the kids.

The children sat in the circle and I asked them, "What has changed in the room? What was it like before? What is it like now?" *The mice weren't pregnant and now they are....The walls have pictures of the kids' bodies ....The bulletin boards have changed....The clock used*

to work, now it's broken....The table used to have leaves and seeds, then it had Christmas and Gingerbread houses. Now it has tiny things....Ali's building is built. Before, it fell down.

I wanted to talk about this because today Ms. Rose, Jane's mother, came to do a Coal Flower/Crystal Garden experiment. It's interesting because the changes happen quickly and dramatically.

Coal Flower/Crystal Garden

Put 5 pieces of charcoal into a glass bowl.
Mix together: ¼ cup blueing
¼ cup water
1 T ammonia
Pour solution over charcoal.
Drops of food coloring will make a "rainbow" crystal garden. Add water to bowl as it dries up. DO NOT DISTURB.

Ms. Rose started to tell the children what scientists do, and I was uncomfortable with some of the things she was saying, so I helped a little. Together, we reminded them of the things in the room they said had changed. Then I got the tray with the Coal Flower experiment on it, and I asked the children if they remembered what it looked like before, when they first started. *It was coal....It was liquid....It smelled awful.* Then we talked about how it had changed. "When Ms. Rose says she's doing an experiment with you, she means she's watching to see if and how the things in the bowl change. I want you to look at this bowl whenever you think of it. It's different now from what it was in the morning. And by the end of the day, it will have changed some more. Keep watching. Some of you might want to draw a picture or write about what you see each time you look."

March 13. Gifts came from Barbara Montoya's class today. There were letters and a Bilingual Picture Dictionary for the whole class and a wrapped present for Enrico. Inside were two books written in Spanish. The kids asked me to read one of them and I did. I translated and Enrico helped. The children tried to guess from the pictures what the translation might be.

We had a wonderful discussion with the parents who helped today: Benjamin's mom, Sharon; Mark's dad, Donald; and Maria's mom, Thalia. They talked about their work.

Donald talked about his work at the Budd Company where they make steel tops for vans. He described how the tops are made and then assembled at another plant. Atiya thought a plant was a tree with leaves and roots in a pot. Questions from the children: *How does a motor work?....How come you don't decide on your own working hours? Why do you keep getting laid off?* (From Mark)

Once again, many of the ideas were *above* the kids' heads, but they seemed quite interested. I did notice a

difference in the girls' and boys' involvement in the discussion. Even at six lines are drawn at what boys or girls should be interested in, and most of the girls are not interested in vans and the workings of cars.

Sharon is both a nurse and a homemaker. The children asked her a lot about what she does in the emergency room of a local hospital. Lloyd was *sure* she was the nurse who had taken care of him recently, though she hasn't worked for the past few months.

I asked, "What kind of work do you do at home? That's hard work, too." Sharon described her work at home.

After lunch, Thalia, who is a legal secretary, spoke to the children about her work. (She's been helping in the classroom all week.) She started by saying that she works for a group of lawyers. Leonard: "What's a lawyer?" I helped by asking the children if they knew what a law is. It's a rule. "Do you remember the bad laws that Martin Luther King had to fight against? Well, when he was arrested, he needed a lawyer to help him understand the law. When he went to court, the lawyer explained everything. Lawyers help people who get arrested."

"Who knows what Court is?" Lots of kids had seen courts on TV, many had been in one. So they had some sense of that.

Thalia said, "I work for lawyers who take care of juvenile cases. Does anyone know what that is? Juvenile means children, so the lawyers I work with help children if adults do bad things to them." Thalia carefully explained the difference between a spanking and child abuse.

I asked Thalia to tell us about the machines she uses at work. Then I said that secretaries are very important because very often the lawyers don't know how to do the things Thalia can do. It would take them a long time to type a letter. She can do it really fast.

She suddenly remembered shorthand, and she wrote a note to the class on the board in shorthand, then read it back. They loved it. Later, they dictated as she wrote. She could write as fast as they spoke. I think they understood its usefulness. She wrote the color words in shorthand to add to our collection.

March 16. The rabbit had been sick for two weeks--neither eating nor drinking, nor having a bowel movement. I took her home. On Saturday, she had five dead and malformed babies. I'd taken her to the vet who said she wasn't pregnant and gave her a laxative. After the birth, she still did not eat. So after talking to Barbara Ruth about the likelihood of her having successful pregnancies again, we agreed that I should take her to the SPCA to be *put down*. I needed Barbara's (somebody's) assurance that it would be okay. I really can't see spending lots of money on animals that can reproduce so quickly, but I

know this kind of detached attitude is not acceptable to most people.

I had to tell the children about the rabbit's death. I did not mention the SPCA--just that the rabbit was sick and died. They would like another rabbit and Peg said she'd mate hers and give us a baby.

This led to a discussion about the mouse babies. They are about a week old, and it's clear that one or two of them will not make it. I explained this to the children, telling them that when lots of babies are born to some animals the mother cannot care for all of them. The *runt* of the litter keeps getting pushed out of the way. You can sometimes save a runt by taking it home and caring for it away from the mother.

March 17. Ms. Rose sent her human skull to school. Although it's painted a horrible shade of green, it's still a skull, and in much better condition than the skeleton I've had in my class for years. I held it in front of the class and told the children that everyone has bones like this in their head, under their skin, though the bones are not green.

First I touched the boundaries of the hole around the eyes. "Touch yours--the bone around your eyes. It's just the right size for your eye to fit in.

"Open and close your mouth. Touch your jaw bone. Open and close your mouth. Now, don't get scared. It's going to look scary. I opened and closed the jaw of the skull.

"Now feel your head. Knock on it." I did the same on the skull. "Why do you think this bone is so hard?" *To protect your brain....If you got hit on the head and you had no skull, you'd die.*

"Today someone got hit on the head with a block. Well, if she didn't have a skull, that block would have injured her brain. Your brain controls everything you do--talk, walk, think, stand up. Sometimes when people get old, their brain gets hurt. It's called a stroke. (Hands go up.) Then they have trouble doing some things." Mark told us that his grandfather had a stroke and that he had trouble hearing and talking. I explained that the stroke happened inside his brain, but the same thing can happen if one's skull gets hit so hard that it hurts the brain.

I don't always talk about St. Patrick's Day, but with so many Irish-American kids, and wit[illegible] parents asking me to mention white as well as black holidays, I decided to mention it. I got the globe and showed the kids where Ireland is. I explained that that's where some of their grandparents and great grandparents came from.

Felicia asked, "Is the earth really round?" Yes. "It looks flat to me." I said, "I know. It looks flat to me, too, but we can tell from the pictures astronauts took in outer space that it is round."

I read *Fin MeCool*--one of my favorite tales, especially because the heroine is the wife, and she's tiny. It's an Irish legend.

I'd love to make a stuffed giant out of paper to reach from the floor to the ceiling. And to have kids make smaller stuffed monsters. Susan and I did something like that years ago.

Nina is so much fun to watch at Sustained Reading Time. She wants to learn to read so badly but is still not remembering words. She loves the Bowmar books and makes up stories that are not only coherent but also close to the text. Today she *told* me a book called *I Go Shopping*. As she told it, she took on the manner and speech of a reader--word by word. She told it to me again, then I asked her if she wanted me to read it. When I finished reading the first page, Nina said in a surprised tone, "I read it wrong?" She was so sure that what she'd done was reading. I said, "You read it fine. I was just reading the words."

Today at our regular meeting of the Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative, I presented. The issue was "Sally becomes anxious when she tries to read." The following are the recommendations that the group gave me. I'll try some and wait with others.

Recommendations - Staff Review

1. She doesn't fit the pattern that girls are good at reading; boys, at math. Spend more time on math and writing with her. Don't try new things in reading. 2. Make a shape book, about the girl, the butterfly, to help her focus on a topic. 3. Something with a puppet--teach it something (to pretend read?). 4. Find ways to cut down the anxiety: When giving instructions to the whole class, make sure she understands. Ask her to give it back. 5. Be supportive and sympathetic. "I've noticed that you have trouble understanding. I'm giving you extra help, because when I explain it, you understand it." 6. At Parent Conference--Talk about the anxiety. Get across the message that Sally needs time. 7. Have direct conversation with her that she will learn to read. 8. Her mother should not ask the child to read nor should she examine her books when she helps in the class. If she wants to see Sally's work, she should do it when Sally is at recess. She should read with her at home. At school she should play a more generally helpful role--to Sally and the rest. Help with dictation, numbers. Point out that Sally is trying to make a place for herself. Her life in school is separate from home. We want to be careful that Sally's privacy is not invaded. Ask, "Would you feel comfortable ignoring your child's work in school? I feel strongly that..." 9. Write some stories about her with a consistent sight vocabulary. 10. Her writing book gives immediate gratification. Continue it. 11. Try to get her to do more dictation. 12. Involve her in looking at books and then making them. 13. Show her mother all the work at the conference. Show the progress. 14. Say to her mother how remarkable and well-executed the drawings are and the writing progress. 15. Make a listening center for her

and others. 16. Help her see where she's like other children and where she's different. 17. Film strips would be fun for her as well as the listening center. 18. Gymnastics--Write out Jump Rope Rhymes--Inter-Action Kit. Houghton Mifflin has some. 19. Mother in room--perhaps you'll have to tell the mother not to work with her. 20. Provide rocking chair--allows for release of tension. 21. Ask her what she would like to do with her mother when she comes. 22. Show the child how much she's learned. 23. Read her stories about people who have trouble or are slow. 24. Put her into a teaching relationship with others. 25. Find another time of day to read and have success. 26. Follett Fairy Tales are easy to read. 27. Watch to be sure she's comfortable with dictation. 28. Reflect on the words "anxiety" or "anxious." 29. Look at Belinda's recommendations. 30. Pre-plan for anxious moments. 31. Dictate Fairy Tales she knows already. 32. Try to support the progress without anxiety.

March 18. What a day. I had two parents' meetings, one in the morning at school and one in the evening at a parent's home. In planning the meeting I hoped to talk about some of the general issues which might come up at report card conferences, but which there would be no time to talk about then. I also asked parents to let me know if they had anything special that they wished to discuss.

The parents made announcements, expressed satisfaction with Ms. Ewell's social studies unit on conservation of water. In answer to their questions, I talked about my expectations for them in math and about how I teach multiplication. I talked about the confusion the children have with the equal sign. I said it's all right for the children to use their fingers when doing arithmetic.

I expressed concern over the differences I noticed between boys' and girls' behavior in the classroom. Boys choose to do math more than girls; in their drawings, girls draw house, tree, flowers, butterflies and write about such things, while boys draw and write about adventure--space, deep sea divers, monsters, pirates, rockets, superheroes. I've noticed this over 10 years of teaching. I think the danger is in valuing one motif over another. We talked some more about sex role stereotypes, and they made recommendations about what we could do at home and at school.

The parents enjoy these meetings because they have a chance to discuss things that they've been thinking about.

March 19. I am concerned right now with the frantic pace of my life. Wanting to type the children's stories adds to the problem. There's no time to talk to friends.

March 20. I met Chris Davis at the North Dakota Study Group meeting at Wingspread. She's an educator from

Australia who is doing graduate work at Harvard. Because I forgot to have the children sitting on the rug, we had to have the discussion with them at their desks. I hate that because they are too spread out and too easily distracted. I like it best when they can sit in 213A, the small auxiliary room where we usually talk. Chris' visit gave the children a chance to discuss geography again.

There was another argument between Maria, Atiya, Anita, Sally, and Pam. It seemed like one of those "I won't be your friend" arguments. Sally was really afraid to say what Anita said to upset her, but finally she whispered it in my ear. "God will strike you down dead if you don't be my friend." Sometimes you just have to listen. You can't really solve anything.

Dorothy Ballard invited us and 212 to her room to hear a story. I've been wanting to get back to community singing and I think this was the beginning. Her story was one she learned in her course with Linda Goss, a well-known storyteller. It had all the important things: repetition, audience participation, etc. Afterwards I led the children in "The Man Who Lived on the Moon."

We've been singing while waiting for kids to use the bathroom before lunch and support. Never let it be said that I waste a minute.

One of the mouse babies was found dead--floating in the cup. It was just what I thought might happen. Many children wanted to touch it. I put it on the little table for all to see and touch if they wished.

March 23. Sally got one of the Bill Martin Jr. books, and started looking at it (after I yelled at her to stop following Anita around--which she always does at Sustained Reading Time--and to get a book and come sit next to me NOW). She was flipping pages and I told her she *must* go through it page by page to find the words she could read. *Or* she could pretend to read it. But NO MORE FLIPPING! I wanted her to keep busy and comfortable until I finished reading with Leonard.

I finished and turned to help her. The book is filled with lovely poems and we read one about Pinkie, together. I stopped for the words I knew she knew or could figure out.

Then we came to a page that had words written all around the page so that the book had to be turned around and around. I read the first few words and Sally said, "I know that song." Edie Klausner was there and she said she knew it, too. They sang it to me and then we sang it together as I pointed to the words. Sally did it herself a few times and said, "Is it all right if I read this book tomorrow?"

Tomorrow...that leads me to my current obsession--time. I keep promising myself and the kids to do things and I'm not getting them done. Where is the time going? Mark wants to know, "Where's the book about our dreams? When are you ever going to take down the pictures of Martin Luther King?" I still haven't gotten around to

making song books with songs that the children already know, though I know how much it would help the beginning readers. We haven't sent thank-you letters for the gift from Barbara Montoya's class. In past years, by the end of February, I'd have put out seeds and the kids would have sorted, soaked, sprouted, and planted them. I always like to do it before spring, and now I can't even *find* the seeds.

March 24. I *had* to take some time off. I got two *good* nights' sleep, some quiet days by myself, and some time to think. If I hadn't, the children would have suffered. I still need to find time to make some new clothes, learn to play the guitar, read, see my friends.

Alice Seletsky, from Central Park East, feels that at some point earlier than fifth grade kids should be taught standard spelling because they get frozen with their own versions if standard is not taught.

I asked the parents at the parents' meeting if they wanted spelling tests, but when I told them that some kids get really upset and cry when they don't remember the words, or are afraid of a beating if they don't do well, they said to forget the tests for first grade. I agree.

I thought of just sending home three to five words a week for the kids to learn with no test. Those would be the words for the week and I'd randomly check to see if kids were learning them. Rita thought that sending a complete spelling list to the parents in the homework book, and asking *them* to work with the kid and to put a star next to the words the child knows would be a way. Sometime between second and fourth grade we have to do *something*.

And then there is William, who can spell almost any word correctly and he's only in first grade.

Atiya was showing off her underpants today, by continually lifting her short skirt. She's a flirt, and when she does this, it really provokes the boys. I asked everyone to sit in a circle and started, "Who wears underpants? Well, then you all know what they look like. They look like a bathing suit. How many of you wear bathing suits? So, you don't need to look under girls' dresses, since you know what they're like. And girls, since everyone has seen underpants, you don't need to show yours off."

March 26. I got a new child today--Zachary. He seems to be very outspoken and very articulate. He said in the office, "I know I'm going to like this teacher because she's white." His mother was embarrassed and I was surprised at his frankness. I said, "You'll like *most* of the teachers in this school--black or white." In the classroom, Zach kept interrupting by asking questions, and I had to insist that he raise his hand. I promised we'd have time to talk on our walk.

It was such a hectic day, first, because I had been out for two days; second, because we were going for a walk and that meant a break in the routine; third, because the clocks were off again and we had a longer sitting time than usual.

I wanted the children to know how pleased I was with their behavior during my absence. I read the note that the substitute left for me describing their independence.

Then I told them that we are going for a walk to plant a garden. We reviewed the rules for walking and, though Ms. Rose came into the classroom with the twins before we left, and though they had to spend some time looking at the animals, we managed to pull them away and leave.

I'd hoped to point out lots of signs of spring on this walk to the Rose's house, but we didn't see as much as I'd hoped. We did see a praying mantis case. I pointed to the forsythia bushes which are in bloom and wondered aloud, "Have you ever seen these before?" No one remembered them from the classroom where we'd had them since the middle of February. We saw a clump of blooming daffodils.

At Jane's house the kids were more interested in running around and using the play equipment than in planting the seeds, but after a few helped turn the dirt, we called everyone over to have them watch in a more formal way.

We planted peas, radishes, beet and lettuce seeds, and onion sets. As the children took turns planting, we talked--about the importance of worms, about how the soil feels, about the twin babies walking on the seeds, and about the conditions seeds need in order to grow.

After a trip I always like to think about how it was organized and how it might have been better. I feel that there should be some times when we visit the Rose's to use the play equipment and other times when we come to plant. We should discuss what we are going to do immediately before we leave.

I like the children to go into the garden and circle the planting area, then to take turns digging, then I like to give each one a chance to plant and cover the seeds. I really prefer that it be a formal, group experience in which everyone takes a turn, rather than "Who wants to help?"

Judy Buchanan asked a good question of Ginny Bommentre at the Teachers' Learning Cooperative meeting today, when she did her Review of Practice: What do you say to the class to help them to clarify the continuity of their work? I need to think about how *I* do that.

March 27. We had some more helpers and visitors today. The kids seem to really enjoy asking them questions and it's become a kind of ritual.

Jill's dad teaches science at Friends Select School, and the kids had lots of questions. *What kinds of experiments do you do?....Do you wear any special clothes?....*

How do you get to work?....What do you do to do experiments with electricity? You can't just take electricity and put it someplace....What do you do with the light bulbs?....What do you put in the microscopes?

I asked the children, "Did we ever do any experiments?" They mentioned the snow and thermometer, and the crystal garden. Jill's dad said that he knows that we do a lot of science in our class by watching, observing, describing, and, most important, asking questions.

They interviewed a student teacher who is working in a fifth grade. *Where do you work? What do they learn in fifth grade?* After she told them about the arithmetic in fifth grade, they spent some time showing her how well they can add two large numbers that are the same (100 + 100, 50 + 50, 25 + 25).

Yesterday's homework was, "What is a seed?" *Inside is a plant....Seeds make flowers grow....Seeds make trees grow....You put water in the soil, then it grows ....It comes out of fruit....They make fruits grow.... Seeds make food grow....Seeds make vegetables grow.... Seeds make a whole bush grow....They make buds bloom* ....(What happens after flowers bloom?)....*Some give out more seeds....After you plant them, wet them....A seed is a young plant....Seeds can turn to fruit or vegetables ....You need a plant and a plant needs you....It is the shell of a baby plant....A seed has roots after it is planted in the ground.*

Then I asked, "Where do seeds come from?" *They come from the thing the seed makes....It comes from the fruit or vegetable it was in....From green beans....It drops from a plant; it has seeds in it, it doesn't grow from it....From an apple.*

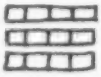
March 30. Barbara, Leonard's guardian, was in. It seems like every time she's in, I'm in a bad mood and that's not good. She remarked how well everyone worked. So I told the children specifically when I saw good work and deep involvement. As I mentioned each area, I realized that most of them *were* busy--busier and more involved than I'd originally thought. It helps to have another pair of eyes in the room.

Four children started Ukranian wax resist egg dyeing (*pysanki*). I went over some of the safety precautions I feel are necessary, both for the eggs and for the children, since they need to melt wax over a burning candle. Then I asked the following question: "We have 33 children in our class. They all want to make *pysanki*. If four children work each day, how many days will it take all 33 children to dye the eggs?" Henry figured it out. Then I drew 33 lines on the board and circled sets of four lines, saying, "First day, second day, etc."

I finally brought in my California King snake. I'd kept her home, afraid she might die if the room got too cold. I held her as the children asked questions. *How does it move?....How can a snake eat an animal that is*

bigger, like a rabbit?....Can she have babies?....Is it poisonous? There were many more questions and lots of people told stories about experiences with snakes. To ease their fears, I walked around the circle holding the snake with the side of its body, rather than its head, facing them.

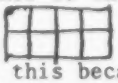
I worked on multiplication in a new way and I'm not sure how good it was. I gave out square chips--less than 12--and said, "You need 12 chips; how many more should I give you?" (Even though this takes a long time, it's worth the thinking.) When everyone had 12 squares, and a piece of paper to use as a work surface, we began.

"Make three rows of four tiles. Make three rows of tiles and put four tiles in each row." Most were able to do it as I wished: 

Some did this for three rows of four:

I said, "I'm going to call them columns if they go up and down. When I say rows--I mean going across." I drew it on the board and asked them to fix it.

I kept asking the children to make rows of tiles. I did this for quite a while. Then I changed it to, "Make two rows of three, make three rows of four, etc."

"Now I'm going to write what I want you to make," and I wrote 2 x 4 and walked around to see if the kids could do it. I asked them to push their rows close together so there would be no space between the rows, e.g., 

I did this because I had never taught the children how to make what the Philadelphia Levels Tests call *arrays*. But I think that my other way (make three plates with four cookies on each plate) is better for a start. I've done it that way for years.

I need to do more stuff with animals' and peoples' bodies (How many legs would four horses have? Three children?).

We played "Guess My Rule." It was a hard one*--Henry guessed the rule this way: "It's two times more plus one of the numbers." I called it a times 3 machine. He really does have a wonderful mathematical mind.

Then I did a minus 2 machine and told them it was a "subtraction" machine--one of the parents had complained that I was not teaching technical terms.

*

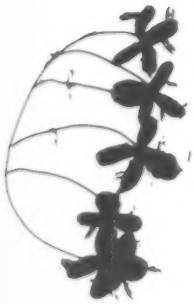
in	out
3	15
2	6
3	9

March 31. It was stupid of me to read the newspaper this morning. I walked to school in tears, thinking about the kidnapping of the children in Atlanta, the attempted assassination of the President, the bombings on the West Bank by the Israelis, beatings, murders, El Salvador.

I felt that I had to speak with the children about the shooting of the President. I worked hard on not lecturing, but I'm afraid I wasn't too successful. I asked what happened yesterday, and they told me, concentrating on the goriest details. We talked about playing with guns, and I told them, "Playing with guns really upsets me; they kill. Why would you even want to *pretend* to kill anyone?"

Robbie said that he has two guns and the children talked about using guns for hunting.

I'm not sure how I feel about the discussion we had, but I knew that the children had seen the incident again and again on television. (It reminded me of a musical piece by Steve Reich, *Come Out and Show Them*, in which five words are repeated many times until the sound is blurred and it becomes like a song.)



We went to visit the trees: a glorious sunny spring day. We saw the magnolia from a different side because I didn't want the children to be bothered by the sun shining in their eyes. The buds are bursting and are showing purple and greenish-yellow. The children said the tree looks like a monster with lots of arms and that the branches look like animals.

We couldn't really see anything different in the maple. "The buds are still there," said Foster. Belinda remarked, "It looks like the tree is touching the clouds." Reggie suddenly noticed that the cloud it appeared to be touching was moving. I asked the children to watch the cloud. Immediately they began to say what it looked like: dog, monster, face with an open mouth, fish, etc. Everyone spoke at once. I asked, "What makes it move?" "The wind." "What is the wind?" "Air moving." It was fun to see something change so rapidly against the tree, which has been stationary for so long.

Zach said that the beech tree is dead. "Why do you say that?" "Because the branches droop downwards." I asked, "How can you tell if a tree is dead?" "It doesn't have any leaves." "Zach, do you think this tree will get leaves?" "Yes, in the spring." "Are you sure?" "There are buds." Other children joined in the discussion and there was no consensus. Many of them feel that in the winter a tree is dead.

Zach said that the beech, if not dead, is old because of all the marks on it. Belinda believes it is old because it is fat.

What? Have we added the dogwood to the trees we visit? The little dogwood in front of the school is dying, I'm afraid. I showed the children the broken-off branches, the peeling bark, the dried buds. I said that I wasn't sure and that we'd have to wait a few weeks to see if any leaves came out. Atiya put her arms around the tree and her head against it and said, "Poor tree."

Tami pointed to a tall, skinny, gangly tree in the corner near an azalea bush. "What's that?" she asked. I said I thought it was a tree from a seed that planted

itself. I didn't think a person had planted it there, so close to the building.

I said, "Wouldn't it be nice if we planted some flowers in front of the school?" They loved the idea. I told the children that I'm worried that people might pick them, step on them, or kill them. They had many suggestions about what to do; like putting a fence and gate around them, and putting signs up. I told Henry and Ben, who live across the street, that they'd have to watch to make sure no one harms them. "Do you think you could ask your friends to be careful when they play football?" They weren't sure that would work.

Perhaps we'll plant some pansies next week. Then we could scatter some zinnea and mixed flower seeds and plant some marigolds. We need a sign. I'm excited.

April 1. I'm not supposed to feed the snake until two days after she's last been handled, so today was the day. The children sat in a circle, and I put the cage in the middle of the floor. Those kids who were unable to see at the corners were allowed to move and stand.

The snake ate immediately. It always happens so fast that I never *really* see how she does it--especially whether or not she uses her mouth to hold the mouse while she wraps around it.

It was really a relaxed event. The kids watched, and as they watched, they just asked questions: *How does that big mouse get into the snake's small mouth?....How can it push the mouse in with no paws or hands?....The mouse is wet. I can see its eyes bulging out....The snake is having trouble swallowing the mouse....I don't think she'll make it....I do....I think the snake will realize the mouse is too big and she won't eat it (a parent)....What happens after the snake swallows the mouse? How does the snake use it?* I had taken several reptile books from the library, and at one quiet point, while the snake was still constricting the mouse, yet appearing to be very still, I asked the children if they'd like me to read about King snakes, and did.

April 3. We had a long visit with the magnolia tree. Standing far away from the tree, we looked at the buds, most of which have shed the outer green covering and are starting to open. The children talked about the color of the buds (green outside, purple, then pink, then black), the shape (like candle flames), and quantity (so many buds). They saw flowers at different stages of bloom (closed, opening).

Many of the blossoms had fallen to the ground. The children picked them up and I asked them to bring them into the classroom without making any changes in them. We put all the specimens on a piece of paper. Then I held each one up, to remind the children what we'd seen outside and give them a closer view of the flowers in all stages of bloom. I said, "I like the way the color goes from dark purple to light pink on each petal." I

showed them how the petals overlapped, as Felicia carefully forced a bud open. One of the children talked about the color of the inside of the petals on the bud which had been forced open--almost greenish-white. Perhaps I got carried away when I asked the children to look at the center of the flower, but I explained what I knew about fertilization and the bees.

Later, I read poems from *Sing a Soft Black Song* by Nikki Giovanni--the one about the baby who is supposed to take a nap in the afternoon and ends up putting its mother to sleep; the one about the girl who is dressed up and can't help getting dirty; the one about the child who is locked up in her yard during the summer while her mother is at work, because her mother loves her. ("What does *that* mean? Pam, you know don't you? Can you explain it?" Pam did, because *she* must stay in her house until her mother comes back from work.)

Report card conferences really went quite well, considering that each night I did the cards for the next day. I *hate* to wait until the last minute, but I felt terribly rushed. Is it because I typed the stories?

I can't find time to do filing and marking the arithmetic workbooks. (I can mark them once; it's checking to see if the kids have corrected them that I can't do.) Well, I asked the parents if I could send the papers home to be corrected after I checked them the first time, and they were *very* happy to help.

Many parents told me that their children were deeply affected by the Martin Luther King discussion. Jill's mother said that she went over to a friend's house on one of the days that we discussed him. Jill said, "I don't really feel like playing with anyone today. I just need to be by myself to think about all this."

Belinda's mother said that she was pleased with my handling of a potentially volatile topic. She knows that white kids *could* be made to feel pretty bad if it were not handled well, and her daughter did not feel guilty to be white.

Jimmy was upset--not crying. Just a little sad.

I really get upset when parents ask if the CAT scores have come in. It usually means they are worried about their kid getting into the Mentally Gifted Program or to Masterman (a school for academically talented children). They don't go until fourth grade. It drives me even crazier when they take the first year grades on the report cards seriously. One of the mothers was upset because her child was only *good* at problem solving, not *excellent*, and that he got a *B* in music. I try to make my written comments and descriptive statements as detailed as possible.

At report card conferences, the comment I got from most people was, "My child tries to read everything. It's amazing! My other kids never did this." It happens every year at this time and, of course, I attribute it to the encouragement they get from me to try all kinds of books--hard and easy--that are in the room. Most of

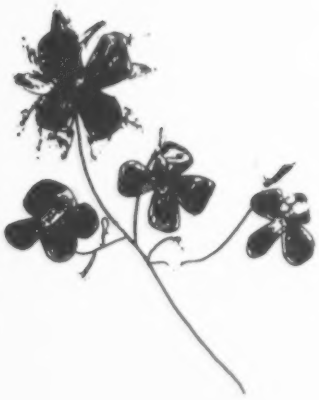
the time I don't limit the children to books in which they will make few mistakes. It's important for them to see that they can read words everywhere. When they discover that, they try more books.

April 6. I led singing in the hall, while waiting to use the bathroom. I sang "Cape Cod Girls"--(they have no combs, comb their hair with codfish bones--laughter).

I also sang "My Grandfather's Clock." They said, "A clock can't be born. It's not alive." I said, "Well, I guess I made a mistake. It should be 'It was bought on the morn of the day that he was born.'" Then David said, "It's like your heart. The clock stops ticking is like a heart stopping beating."

Homework--Words for the week: my, come, why. Write each word five times and try to remember how to spell them. I'll check.

April 7. I don't know what to do with myself. I've been so angry, impatient, and disagreeable--really doing a lot of yelling and screaming. I'm so tired of saying the same thing (like "sit on the rug," or "clean up," etc.) 100 times. I even tried singing to calm myself down, but it doesn't help. I get angry at the kids who won't sing.



Before we went to see the trees, we went to pick up trash in the schoolyard. On Saturday the Home and School parents and some children and teachers cleaned up the entire schoolyard. I had come to help. I thought it would be nice if our class could keep it clean if we did it regularly. But it seems hopeless. There was so much new trash already that we couldn't possibly clean it all up.

The magnolia tree is in full bloom. We saw pink, white, green, and gray against the sky. *It's pretty. It makes shadows on the ground. Some branches have no blossoms.* I asked, "Does that mean they're dead?" *No, because they have buds.*

Paul was touching the bark and was nestled between two branches. I suggested that the children close their eyes, pretend they were blind, and feel the trunk. They described it as rough, smooth, bumpy. *You can feel where a branch was cut off. It's a different kind of bumpy, with lines.* I said, "The way the three big branches come together makes me feel like climbing the tree."

We crossed the street and looked at Henry's maple tree: *The leaves are opening....Little green dots are all over the buds....It seems smaller from right underneath....Those are flowers that are green, not leaves.... It's touching the wire.*

This visit to the trees was not especially pleasant. I think we were outside too long, and the children just could not pay attention to the conversation.

David is crying all the time. He says he doesn't want to go to Prints in Progress (a weekly after-school program). He doesn't want to leave his mom. He doesn't like the Lippincott reader, which I'm obliged to use.

As the year has gone on, he's grown more, not less, dependent on his parents. I'm afraid that in my current angry state I'm not being too supportive.

Jimmy is workbook-crazy. Yesterday he got the Book C Reading workbook and wanted to work on it at Project Time. I'd already told him he could not work on the math workbook. So, if he can't have one, I guess he'll do the other. He rarely chooses anything else. I told him I'll not allow him to race through them. I gave him no choice. I insisted that he weave a strawberry box Easter basket and that he get one of the girls, who had already made one, to help him. I promised him that other boys would soon be making baskets. At first he was unhappy, then he loved it.

The Board of Education is starting to talk about cutting teachers again.

April 8. Jane brought me a daffodil, Belinda brought two dandelions, and Pam brought a fallen branch from a tree, filled with green flowers. I wanted to pass the daffodil and branch around. And I wanted to put the flowers and dandelions under the microscope. But I can't do all that *and* the *pysanki.*

I can't believe that everyone has done an egg. And I *finally* figured out how to get the wax off. I'd forgotten.

Yesterday, on the way out of Henry's yard, I pointed to some *baby* trees growing on the lawn under the maple tree. This morning I pulled up one of the maple seedlings and took it into the classroom where the children described it: *It's a little brown....The flowers are green....There's a little dirt down at the bottom....It's brown and green....The stem is straight....It has a root at the bottom....The leaves are bumpy....It has green leaves....There's a hook on the bottom....Two leaves have bumps like your hand....The top leaves are pointy, the bottom are round....Points are coming out; at the tip it's like the tip of a rocket....The top leaves look like the wings of a bird....On the top leaves, the ends have sharper points than the little ones....The top leaves look like leaves that can prick you....The top leaves look like knives; they're sharp....The top leaves look like ivy, the bottom leaves are like peas....It's soft and smooth....There's a bit of brown and a little string-like thing on the bottom....The top looks like wings.... It has four leaves, it looks like a little tree....The leaf looks like a triangle....It's like a little branch with four leaves....Two look the same and the other two look the same....There are little triangles on the top ....It has a curl at the bottom....There are leaves on the leaves....It feels smooth....It has a center stem.... It splits itself in half....The leaves are almost like a heart....It's almost shaped like bird wings....It's bumpy on the leaves on top....The root looks like a rock ....There is a root on the bottom....The whole thing is like a piece of paper cut out with four leaves....It has*

little cracks....The top leaves are like angels' wings in back....The bottom of it is like an ice skate....It's like a person....The top is like a shawl....It's like a flower.

I turned the seedling so that the leaves pointed down and the roots pointed up. I asked, "How do you know that now this is upside down?" They said that the roots belong at the bottom and the leaves belong at the top. Besides, the bottom should have dirt on it, and it does. Then I said, "You probably won't believe this, but Henry's tree looked just like this when it first started to grow." I reminded them of Millicent Selsam's book *The Maple Tree*, which I'd read to them, but which I'm sure they have forgotten. I'll have to borrow it from the free library again.

Today Ginny and I finally got together on the books. I moved one of my shelves to her library area, which is in 213, the empty room between our spaces. I put chapter books, craft books, and biographies there, all color coded with tape. We gathered in the library area and I told both classes about the change.

"We have so many books in 214, we thought it would be a good idea to get together and share them. But these are mostly my own books. That's why you'll see my name on most of them. I have to admit, I'm a little worried about them getting ruined."

I then showed the children many of the books, making sure they noticed that I was matching the tape on each shelf. I made sure they knew some rules for using books, especially what they should do if they found a book that was torn.

It's interesting. My books represent so much to me --a life's collection. Ginny and I have worked next to each other for years, yet it's only within the past year that I've felt comfortable enough to think of letting more children than those I can watch (my own class) use them. It takes a lot of trust. Maybe soon we'll get the science books out. And who knows--perhaps the libraries will soon be completely combined.

We played the Paper Bag Guessing Game. The children can now play it without me.

April 9. Some fourth-grade kids brought Rita some tulips. She lent them to me. We passed them around. The first one was a red and yellow tulip. I asked the kids to describe it. Then we got the red tulip and described how it was different from the first one. Finally, we described the similarities between the two tulips.

I asked, "Does anyone know what kind of flower this is?" Many said it was a rose. I told them that they are both called tulips, though, and that there are many colors and kinds of tulips.

I love to look at flowers closely. It might be nice to show the children some Georgia O'Keefe paintings of flowers.

Rita did a Staff Review of a nonreader, Paul, at the Teachers' Learning Cooperative meeting today. I had no idea he was 12. I feel so strongly that he needs to be told that he already can read some. Is it any different from a small child? Just because he's 12, can't we concentrate on what he *can* do? I feel that no matter what age, once a child can see that he can read at least *some* words in *any* book, he'll search for and come up with more and more in many books. It's certainly what makes me go on with Sally and Foster. And what made me know that Jane would read.

It becomes a puzzle for a child to figure out words, a search, an unfolding. The more they look, the more they find. I know this deep in my bones, though I certainly can't prove it.

I did an observation of Paul for Rita. It's really the first written observation I've ever done, and I know it's too long. Beyond that, I don't know if it helped or not. I'm looking forward to getting some comments about it.

April 10. Barbara, Leonard's guardian, an organizer for a union local in Philadelphia, came to talk about her experiences. She'd given the talk a great deal of thought. She asked lots of questions, many of them difficult for the children to answer: *What's a union?.... Who knows a working person? Raise your hand....Working people were unhappy. They wanted more money and less hours. They wanted children to stop working. They went to see the boss. What happened when they went to see the boss?....What did the workers do?....Who went on strike this year?....What else does a union do?....* She taught them the chorus to "There Once Was a Union Maid." I said, "It's like Martin Luther King getting the black people together to fight the bad laws. People can get a lot done if they work together."

Althea, Reggie's mom, was surprised by the request to talk about her work as a nurse's aide at a nearby boarding home, where she fixes trays, makes beds, takes people for walks, and generally makes them comfortable. The children were interested in her working hours because she works at night from 11 pm to 7 am. The children whose parents also work at night talked about their sleeping patterns. I said to David, "You really hate it that your mom is working while you are at home. But, you see, other parents do, too. You're not the only one."

The children wanted to know who takes care of Reggie when his mother works, if Reggie ever visited her at work, and if she works in a hospital.

Althea said Reggie was so upset that she had not come in for his report card (he just went to his room and sulked) that she *knew* she'd better come in. Not only did he get a chance to show her his writing and to read to her, but he beamed with pride as she spoke to the whole class about her work. I told his mother that he

doesn't realize how capable and intelligent and wonderful he is, and that her visit helped....

April 23. I love to see the kids on picture day. Many of the girls have their hair in plaits and rolls, and curls and bows; the boys wear suits and shirts. Their hair is either carefully picked or slicked down. Many front teeth are missing. Occasionally a boy shows up (as did Barney today and my son, Lee, when he was six) wearing a bow tie like Dad's. This year, we had a walking trip on picture day. I warned the children that no matter how dressed up they got, they should wear shoes that would be comfortable for walking. So those boys who wore their Easter suits also wore sneakers. It looked odd, but I think they were glad.

I don't like complimenting children when they dress up for picture-taking, yet the event seems to cry out for me to say, "How nice you look!" Dressing up is special, though the kids look beautiful to me every day. It's like when you lose weight and people tell you how wonderful you look. It makes you wonder just how awful you looked before.

I also love watching the picture-taking process. I wonder how the photographer can keep up her energy and be pleasant through what must become a terribly boring day. The children all look so wonderful, so polished and combed, I'm always surprised and a little disappointed when the pictures come back with strands of hair flying and eyes half-closed.

We took a trip to the colonial homes along Germantown Avenue which have become the Germantown Historical Society Museums. They house an excellent collection of furniture, clothing, toys, quilts, and much more, from Pre-Revolutionary times to at least 1950.

I should have walked over to the Society office a few days ago to plan the trip with Martin, the director. I'm always forgetting to do that. It's part of my rather casual attitude about trips. Though I told Martin that I only wanted to see the miniatures and toys in Howell House, where Jane lives, he was determined to give us our money's worth, and arranged for some elderly volunteers to escort the children. I'm always surprised by the children's interests in artifacts and furniture, but there was no time for them to sit and absorb what they were seeing.

The children saw furniture and old musical instruments in the first building. Then we went across the street to the costume museum. Then we were rushed back across the street to the Howell House to see the toys and miniatures. By that time, I felt we needed some focus and relaxation, so after Martin let Leonard ride on a proto-bicycle I asked everyone to sit down on the floor. I pointed to one of the showcases and said, "What do you see? Describe it." I felt everyone begin to calm down--comfortable in an old routine. They noticed many details.

I wonder if Martin learned anything from that. He probably didn't because he wanted us to move on to see the tools, model houses, sleds, and fire pumper. Ms. Rose suggested that we remain with the toys and miniatures, but to no avail. Martin was determined that we see all he'd planned in the hour allotted. For me, each room could have been a trip in itself.

I was tense because I wanted the kids to listen, because I was afraid they might break something, because I didn't know what they could touch and what they couldn't. I was really afraid that Martin would be angry and that something would break. I was anticipating his criticism. But he said, "I like the kids to try everything." He wasn't worried about things breaking at all.

Today I chaired a Reflective Conversation on *Number* at the Teachers' Learning Cooperative meeting.

April 24. On the ride downtown with Peg Perlmutter we talked some more about number and math. I realized a few things. I seem to have a good sense of which early math experiences children need. My problem comes in organizing them into some kind of program. I don't like the Philadelphia Levels program because I think it's developmentally unsound. I'm starting to think that one of these years I'll follow a math series for a whole year, using the teachers' guide. Even though I hated the Lippincott Reading Series, I certainly learned a lot when I followed the teachers' guides for a year. I'm bothered by having no unity, no overall plan, and many of my kids seem a little advanced for Baratta-Lorton's *Mathematics Their Way*. Many can work exclusively with numbers, I think.

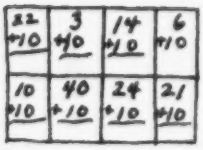
I'd like to consider more mathematical activities that grow naturally from the life of my classroom, but I haven't done that yet. And I know I never give enough drill.

I had no time to talk about the trip to the Historical Society with the children. We were just too busy. I always like to see how the children felt about a trip and what they remember.

The levels test requires that the children be able to make up two problems for this domino* to illustrate the commutative law. I did a few examples of these problems on the board, $\begin{array}{r} 2 \\ +3 \\ \hline 5 \end{array}$ $\begin{array}{r} 3 \\ +2 \\ \hline 5 \end{array}$ then drew some dominoes and asked kids to write the problems. I explained that when you add, it doesn't matter which number you add first; $\begin{array}{r} 3 \\ +2 \\ \hline 5 \end{array}$ gives the same sum as $\begin{array}{r} 2 \\ +3 \\ \hline 5 \end{array}$.

Then I asked if you can do the same thing with subtraction. I'm not sure anyone really knew. I gave a problem: $\begin{array}{r} 3 \\ -5 \\ \hline \end{array}$. Most said that zero would be the answer.

I worked with a small arithmetic group on n + 10. Kate Guerin once showed me how to make a flexible worksheet with not much work: Make a ditto paper with squares



blocked off. Put a number into each grid. Run it off. Then, give the children any number and tell them what operation to do. Today I gave +10, and they had to write the problem and sum for each number plus 10. Here's another example of dropping something on them out of the sky with very little preparation. I should have done more work with the 100 board and adding tens to numbers. I tried to show the children not to bother to say 0 + n because as soon as they see a 0, they should just write the same number under the line. I get so impatient when I think the kids will understand something and don't quite. Then I pull back. But often my initial reaction is, "I know you can understand this. Otherwise I wouldn't be teaching it to you."

I saw a list of spelling words in one of the second grade classes today. I must go back and copy it tomorrow. I'd never give kids those words in second grade. Yet I do feel that some learning of convention is necessary and certainly possible, even in second grade.

My most recent way of dealing with spelling grew out of the discussion with Rita Carney and another with parents. Every Monday I choose three words for the children. I choose them because they are commonly requested for stories, or they are commonly misspelled or have many rhymes. The homework says, "Words for the week: *went, go, house.* Write each word 5 times. Practice the old words." Sometimes I say, "Write a sentence for each word." Then, during the week, during a transition time, I ask different kids to spell words from the list by heart. I also ask for rhymes. So far, we have *went, my, go, house, who, came, car, day.* Then, when the children use these words in the stories, I ask them to correct those that are misspelled: "Oh. That was one of your spelling words. How could you fix it? Please fix it."

When a child came to me today and said, "Please spell *name*," I said, "It rhymes with *came*. Can you spell that? Oh. Then how do you think you could spell *name*? Only one letter gets changed. Good."

I need to write a list of possible spelling words.

The snake ate another mouse--this time it was a dead one that I'd raised at home, frozen, then defrosted. I explained to the children that I wasn't sure the snake would eat a dead mouse since, when snakes live in the woods, they only eat living things.

One of our class mice had died and the children asked why I didn't feed it to the snake. I said I didn't know why it died. It might have been sick or poisoned... They finished, "If the mouse was sick, it might make the snake sick."

The snake ate the dead mouse. It was interesting to note that she grabbed and wrapped it even though it was dead, though she didn't hold it very long before she ate it. When she ate it, she tried to get it into her mouth from the middle, sideways, but couldn't. So she turned it around somehow so that the mouse went in head first.

It's hard to imagine doing that with no hands, and each time I see it I forget how it's done. I'll try to watch more carefully next time.

An unlikely combination is forming in the room--Ali and David. Ali has a terrible temper, is often mean in his teasing, and sometimes gets terribly wild. David is so quiet, serious and well-behaved. He makes sure that he follows all the rules. This doesn't mean that he doesn't have fun. But he doesn't like to get into trouble.

The children all love to build with a set of small colored blocks that I brought from home. They work on the floor and bring cars from home to build garages and racing tracks, and use my miniature animals for dramatic play. (I call what they build *small worlds*.) Often they enjoy making maps or drawings of their structures when they have finished building.

Ali was working on the floor with colored blocks. When David, who had also signed up for them, arrived Ali left. There seems to be an unspoken rule for Ali that he not work with the white kids. Either he feels that they don't want to; or *he* doesn't want to; or he thinks I won't let him. Whatever the reason, except with the live animals and Lego, it's rare. When I noticed Ali had left, I called him back and asked David to join us. I said, "Now, look. I think you two could *really* build a great structure together. Talk it over and see what you can come up with. I think you two could make a great team." They did and they were. Later, at Sustained Reading time, they read together.

I watched Belinda as she read *The Biography of Helen Keller*. It was a chapter on Helen's learning to speak with her voice. I assume that the teacher was showing Helen how to move her lips. Belinda was doing those mouth motions. Later when Helen was working on learning to sign, Belinda leaned over and said something to Jane in sign language.

Belinda and I both know that this book is a little too hard for her. But it is compelling. I'll suggest that she read the other simpler version I have, if she wishes. Though it's been hard, she's done amazingly well.

April 27. I asked the children, "Why do I give you spelling words to learn?" I wrote the question on the board and we discussed it: *So we can go to second grade ....So we can pass....So we can be smart....So we won't come to ask you for so many words on cards....So we can learn.*

I told them they learn from all the things we do in this room. "You learn from the blocks, from drawing, you learn from reading and from working with clay. But why do you need to learn to spell words?" *So that when you go to the supermarket, you will be able to read the labels and know what you are buying....When you grow up and drive, you need to be able to read the signs.*

I agreed that spelling does help you to learn to read, but continued, "Can anyone think of more reasons for learning to spell?" *So that we can write stories.... So that we can write letters.* Then I explained, "There is a correct way of spelling almost every word. When you're first learning to write stories, it's okay to sound out words and spell them the way they sound. I can read those words, but it's hard. After you know how to write stories, you need to learn the correct spelling. It's just easier for you and me to read. And it's my job to teach you how to spell correctly."

The magnolia tree has small, bright green leaves. Bethann said, "After the pink leaves came off, then the green leaves grew."

We looked at the beech from about 100 feet away, farther away than we'd ever looked at it before. Belinda said, "From where we're standing we seem to be the same size as the tree. That's because we're standing so far away. I never noticed that before." The children talked about the colors and the shade underneath.

We went under the beech where the children could see the fruit, which they called little balls, cherries, strawberries, flowers, peaches, buds, pollen, and beechnuts. They asked if I could break off one tiny branch to bring inside. I told them *they'd* better not do this ever but that I would, just this once.

"The green things *are so* leaves, not flowers," said Leonard, remembering our last visit. He couldn't see the green flowers as anything but leaves. I remembered my surprise about four years ago when I realized that maple flowers are green. I'd been looking at maple trees for 40 years and never really noticed that.

Another child said, "Every day it changes," and I said that the maple had indeed changed quickly. We wait and wait for something to happen and then the changes happen so quickly that we can't see them or even remember them. I keep wondering how the flowering and growing and losing leaves can occur so fast when summer (green) and winter (no leaves) seem to last so long.

Henry said that his mother doesn't know if this tree is a maple or not. I told him that if he really wanted to know we could get a book to try to find out. "You can usually figure out what kind of tree it is by studying the leaves and matching them to a picture in a book. The name of the tree is usually written next to the picture."

One of the children used the word *veins* (or was it I?). Jimmy asked what they were. I told him about the veins in a human body and then said, "We call the lines on the leaf *veins*. I think they carry food and moisture to the leaves, but I'm not completely sure. We could find *that* out in a book, too."

One of the kids saw the plastic Battleship game and asked to use it at Project Time. I said he could use it after I showed the whole class how to play it. I drew two grids on the board, side-by-side. I put 'ships' (X's) on one, and the children had to tell me where to

place the 'ships' on the other grid. It's an old game, and lots of fun, and the whole class worked together to learn to play. The children had already played the *vector* tic-tac-toe game, so this wasn't new to them. Then I drew an empty grid on the board, drew my 'ships' on graph paper, and kept their location secret. I put O's where there was an incorrect guess, and X's where it was correct. The children found my ships. I promised to run off sheets with grids on them so many could play tomorrow. (I have only one commercial set.) I was happy with my lesson and their interest.

We have to give criterion-referenced tests in math. They are called Math Levels Tests, and we have to give them no matter which math series we use, if any. In first grade, the children are to have completed levels one to three, which includes addition, subtraction, writing number sentences with missing addends (2 + □ = 5), fractions of shapes as well as numbers, some reading of decimals, symbols >, <, =. I was lax and hadn't even finished giving the level 2 test to some very able children.

Last week's daily flyer had an announcement that no more levels tests would be given out unless individually requested. I would be embarrassed in front of the parents not to have completed this minimum, though I never do seem to have time to give and grade them. It never seems as important as teaching. I spoke to the math teacher and she agreed to give me the next level if I promised to give them only to kids who I know will pass. "Too many tests are left half-done at the end of each year. It wastes paper." So today about 15 kids finished level 2. I'm hot to finish completely now.

I finally read the book we made for Barbara Montoya's class to my class. I'd written a thank you letter in the front, and the children were so proud to see their drawings. *Every* child participated. Reggie destroyed his first attempt, but I insisted that he try again. He was proud of the finished drawing.

We had a discussion about the necessity of and the reasons for washing hands after working with the animals.

April 28. First thing today I passed around the small beech twig with leaves and flowers that we'd brought in. The children's descriptions were rich and detailed: *There are balls hanging down with little things sticking up.... The leaves are red....I see black, pink, orange, white, and green....Half of the leaf is green; the other side is red....It has some little white dots on it....The stem of the flower balls is furry....There are lines on the leaves; the first thing on the line is a little white thing starting to go up....The little round things look like they're hanging from a rope....Two of the leaves are sticking together....The little things are holding on to the rope....They look like fruit....The little round balls are soft....The branch is greenish-blackish....The leaves are furry on the end....There are 18 leaves....*

There are 10 little round things; it looks like the round things are growing into flowers....The stem is red; it has cotton on it....It has a new branch growing....The leaves feel like fur is on them....Some leaves are big and some are little....Some small balls are growing, 16, they're babies....On the leaves and stems there is little white stuff....Around the top, it's soft....One has black and red....There are six clumps of leaves; the branch curves up, the flowers curve down....There's one ball, then a thousand little other balls....If you turn it over, it's still curved....The flowers look dead....The leaf is pointing at the top....It's round at the sides ....There is a line through the leaf in the middle, and the lines stick out....It's like a ramp for cars....When you hold it upside down it's like a street that's curved ....The leaves are ovals....Inside the leaf are little lines called veins.

Avise reminded me that I'd promised to have the kids make some posters advertising the school play, *Cinderella*; I'd forgotten. I lightly pencilled in the words, and had the children make the letters fatter and dark, and draw a picture about the story.

We got many blond Cinderellas. I said, "You know, the Cinderella in our school play is going to have brown skin and black hair. She's a beautiful black Cinderella." Many kids changed their pictures.

Sally and Felicia drew the coach; Leonard drew Cinderella on her hands and knees scrubbing the floor, tears streaming from her eyes, the wicked sister standing and watching. All day long the kids asked when the play would be. I explained that the play wouldn't happen for two weeks, but until I show them on the calendar, and cross out days, I can forget about their understanding.

Inspired by hearing Pete Seeger in concert Friday night, we've been singing again. The children love "Abiyoyo" and "There's a Hole in the Bucket."

Mark wanted to do *magic* at Project Time. (That means he got the *Spooky Magic Tricks* book from the shelf and set up one or two of the *tricks*.) After he had things set up, he invited people to watch. When I looked over, I noticed that there were all white boys watching. Visitors arrived, but I quietly called the children who were watching magic around me and began speaking in a soft voice: "I notice that there's something the same about all of you. Does anyone know what?" (It was Mark, David, Paul, Benjamin, Ben, and Henry.) *We all have blue eyes?....We all have blond hair?....We all have freckles?* Mark said, "I know. We're all boys." (I'd not thought of that one. I was focusing on skin color.)

I repeated what Mark said, and then said, "I thought of something else. I noticed that you're all white." Mark said, "Well, I tried, but no one wanted to come." I replied, "People need to know that you really want them. I'll bet some of the kids weren't sure you meant it. Why don't you try again?"

Later I looked and there were a few girls and black kids. Is it okay to do that? I don't do it all the time.

David and Ali continue to work together. They copy homework on the floor, write in writing books together, read together. When I told David's mom how pleased I am with this unlikely twosome, she said, "Oh that's nothing new! Ali and David *often* play together at our house." I remember her saying that David was afraid of Ali because he was so rough, and I remember suggesting time together outside of school. But I'd never seen the result of that effort.

April 29. I've made a slight change in the schedule which seems to be working very well. When the children get back from recess, they sit on the rug for a story or poems until Liz gets in. Then we divide into reading groups immediately, and work until 12:30. By 12:30 all formal reading lessons are finished, and Sustained Reading goes until 1:00. For the two days we've done it, it's been quite relaxed.

Today we dug up a patch of grass near the front of the building to prepare for planting a small flower garden. Two kids dug at a time, hard work because of dandelions and burdock, and about five shook dirt from the roots. The rest drew on the sidewalk with chalk I'd supplied, and ran wild. The soil was rich in earthworms, so it was fun to dig and see what would come up. Tomorrow I'll buy some bedding plants, and Dorothy's class (211), Ginny's class (212), and my class will plant them and some seeds.

I doubt the flowers will last long, and I've warned the kids. I put an announcement in the flyer, asking teachers to tell their kids about the garden and to remind them not to destroy it. Is that giving some kids a good idea?

The kids from across the street play ball there. I've tried to dig out of their line of fire, but who knows? Whatever happens, they'll/we'll learn something.

Miriam, Belinda's mother, usually comes in to help with reading on Wednesdays. Today she talked about her work--she's a bookkeeper for several stores and small businesses in the neighborhood. The kids asked her to be more specific. She told them that she keeps records of the money--how much they take in, how much they pay for the things they sell. She told them she uses an adding machine, which works faster than people. She put several columns of numbers on the board. The children read the numbers. (I was surprised at how many could read money-numbers.) Then she added them. I wished I'd had an adding machine or calculator so that we could have compared speed.

I had a discussion with our reading teacher, Linda. It was actually Ginny's discussion, and I happened in on it. They were talking about the article in the *Oakes Newsletter* about reading. In it, Mrs. Oakes talked about the Pennsylvania State Reading Plan (PCRP) and the

language experiences which constitute it: reading, listening (responding) to literature, writing, and skill learning. She says that entirely too much time is spent on one part of reading--skill teaching/learning--and not enough time is spent on the other three. I loved the article, and will find it extremely helpful with parents.

Linda said that she'd been in some classes where teachers did the PCRP program and where the children didn't learn enough skills. Ginny and I agreed that children need to learn skills, but we said that *first* they just need to learn to read.

This time of year it takes only the slightest comment or observation to set me off into a flurry of uncertainty and dissatisfaction. I just can't tell if I've done a good job or not. You'd think after all these years, after the satisfaction parents seem to express, that I'd *know*. But at this time of year, there's always the questioning about whether the kids have learned as much as they would have in a more traditional setting. (Not that mine is so informal.)

April 30. Today, when Ginny's, Dorothy's, and my class met for storytelling and singing, I spoke to the children about planting flowers. "We don't know whether or not the plants will be left alone, but I think it will be nice to try. I know that no one here will do any terrible things to our plants." John, from 212, suggested that we make a sign that says, "Please Do Not Touch." Sometimes the most mischievous kids know exactly the right thing to do.

Joann, Edward's mother, came to help this morning. She returned in the afternoon to talk about her work. She teaches piano to children using the Suzuki method. Her talk focused on learning to speak. She said, "You learn from hearing your mother and father. They learned from theirs. And so on. Suzuki thinks children can learn music that way, too--by hearing it and imitating it."

The Level III Math Test, grade one, requires that the children be able to write true number sentences (is that what they're called?). They are expected to know the symbols for plus, minus, is greater than, is less than, and is equal to. They are expected to be able to insert the correct symbols:

6 + 3 ◯ 4 　　3 ◯ 2 = 5

4 - 2 ◯ 5 　　4 ◯ 4 = 0

I never learned those comparative symbols (><) until high school algebra, and I had trouble with them then. I could never remember which meant which. I'm not suggesting that we wait until high school algebra to teach them, but I do think that first or second grade is too early for most of them. Teachers use lots of gimmicks, but many (most) of the children still get confused. I wish I could delay teaching these symbols altogether until I feel they're ready.

I wrote this sentence on the board: FIVE IS MORE THAN THREE. "It really took me a long time to write that sentence. I'll write another: SIX IS LESS THAN EIGHT. I'll show you a really fast way of writing those sentences. It's kind of like shorthand. Do you know anyone who can write in shorthand? (Thalia) You can, too. Watch how fast I can write this: 5 IS MORE THAN 3. Should I write it even faster? 5 > 3. Wow! That was fast! I wrote a number sentence that takes the place of *all those words*."

Then I gave many examples and wrote them, pointing out that this is sometimes confusing to learn. I told them that this is how I remember which way the point goes: The teeny-tiny point stays near the smaller numeral; the big wide-open mouth stays near the larger number.

I also interchange the terms "is greater than, is more than, is higher than, is bigger than." I've found that the term "greater" means nothing to the kids; also I've noticed that it's hard for them to say three words for one symbol. They usually say, "five more than two."

I asked many to come to the board and write the sentences which I stated.

Then I gave harder examples: 6 + 3 ◯ 4 and told them how to do those.

My big problem right now is finding time to give drill.

I remember how effectively this is taught with Cuisenaire material, but I haven't had time to take it out.

At the Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative meeting we just talked. Everyone is exhausted. Many people are not attending. Some of us complained about our anxiety about skills. Many of my kids could be learning contractions and more accurate spelling, etc. (Somehow I can't think of what else. I guess I'll get the CRT's out and take a look at what other skills they're supposed to know.)

It always helps when Edie Klausner says, "There is absolutely no evidence that teaching skills will lead to reading." But it's not the beginning readers I'm confused about. I feel confident about how I teach them. It's the more advanced kids. What would I do without Edie? She reminds me of things I've forgotten.

May 1. I brought in a gorgeous pink dogwood branch from our tree at home. I meant to bring a branch from the white one, but forgot. I don't think the kids remembered the dogwood twig with only buds on it that we had passed around earlier. The line of the branch is so beautiful, I wanted the children to describe it from far away before I passed it around. After we had noted the colors and texture, Jill remarked on how small the branch looks at a distance: "It looks about five inches big from far away." They also counted nine flowers.

When I passed the dogwood branch around, the children counted. *The flower has four petals....All the flowers have four petals except the top one....There are 108 leaves....There are 49 leaves.* I asked, "Can you guess how many petals there are? Don't count. I won't call on you if you count." The children's estimates are getting much more reasonable--25, 26, 20 were the usual guesses.

I asked if someone could figure out a fast way to count the petals. No one tried, and I was surprised. Then I think I got in deeper than I meant to. I said, "How many flowers? (Eight.) How many petals on each flower? (Four.) Well, how much is eight fours, or eight sets of four? (More guesses.) Okay, let's count by fours. Four plus four is eight." I touched each flower. Then I didn't know whether to change and say "eight plus eight equals sixteen." But I said, "Eight plus four is 12. That's three fours. Twelve plus four. That's like two plus four. Two plus four is six. Twelve plus four is 16." We did this up to 32. That was really too much. It was a disaster. Anyway, I counted by fours again, touching each flower.

I said that the branch was so beautiful I wanted to paint it. I used water colors. Later, Tonya, Sally, and Susan drew it with felt-tipped pens. Tonya's drawing was extraordinarily accurate. Susan's became a kind of pattern.

I do wonder if I'm passing too many things around the room for description. It might be that the children are getting bored, though they don't complain. They seem to enjoy it. But I wonder--does it warp their enjoyment of things when they must go through this formal exercise? Yet I see its value in enlarged vocabulary and, more important, in more focused observation and description.

We went outside with two shovels, and very formally, with everyone standing around, we planted one-third of the marigolds. There was lots of talk and hope and checking to see if the juicy worms we'd seen yesterday were still there.

Foster was recommended for testing last year. Peg wanted to keep him in kindergarten because he was so immature and because he cried when she asked him to do any academic work. But before the Retention Committee (counselor, math and reading teachers, Checkpoint teacher, and Principal) would even consider keeping him in kindergarten, she had to refer him for testing.

I did see all the things Peg saw--the anxiety and immaturity and somewhat limited vocabulary. But her advice to his mother last year was *so* good, and his mother has relaxed and helped him *so* much, that he's moving right along now academically. He no longer cries when asked letter names and, in fact, has learned most of them incidentally, while writing stories. He knows some letter sounds (d,b,l, p, r,s,t, and probably more). He knows about 10 words from his card box. He has

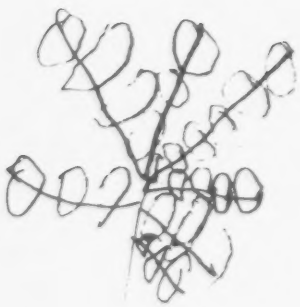
started to write simple sentences to go with his pictures in his drawing/writing book. Most important, he says, "I'm learning to read." He is telling stories to go with books, and he is starting to see himself as a reader.

Foster is *very* popular with *all* of the children in the class and I felt that, though he should probably be retained in first grade next year, I would also like to have him stay with me and his friends so that he doesn't have to start over and feel stupid again.

On Tuesday the Retention Committee agreed that he should remain in first grade. But when I asked if Foster could stay with me, and explained why I felt it would be important, someone said, "You know, there *are* other good teachers in this school who could give him a lot." I said, "Look, each year when I retain children, I give them to others. Nina is being kept in first grade, but although I'd like to teach her, I *know* she'll do okay in another room. But I *know* that this little boy needs to be right where he is."

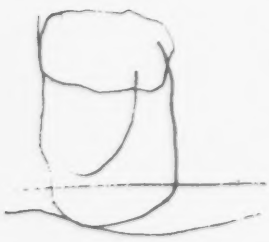
Today, the psychologist tested him. Before doing so, we talked together for about 20 minutes. I outlined Foster's progress, told him he might be anxious and cry when asked questions (the psychologist disagreed, saying that he might only do that with women--like his mother, and not with men--like his Dad, because boys don't cry in front of Dad), and told him that I want him next year.

After testing, Dr. Schwartz came to say he'd tested at 96 I.Q. and that he's bursting to read, he should be retained, and that *he* would recommend my keeping him. "He's just a little late bloomer." When I said that Resource Room might give him more *skills* teaching, he said, "He certainly doesn't need *that*."



I don't like to mix up thinking about what leaps Foster has made this year with the testing and psychologists and all that. Such growth in children, especially in self-confidence, is what really keeps me going. (But I must admit a little worry about whether or not he'll learn to read. Now that he's more independent with the writing, I see that he will, I think.)

I'm concentrating on playing Guess My Number. We've played since the beginning of school. Today I started choosing children to be teacher. I'll choose four each day. After they've written the first response, I ask them what it says. They love the game, they love being teacher, and I learn if they understand the game, the concepts of more and less, and the symbols....



May 4. I wanted the children to see the ground covered with maple seeds. They picked some up and I showed them how many more were still on the tree. They looked at some of the seedlings and Leonard said, "It's just like what we saw in the book." I asked how the seedlings got there. Did someone plant them, or did they just fall and grow? I showed the children poison ivy, which is also growing in Henry's yard.

Then we went to look at our flowers. Alas, they'd been pulled up. Leonard and Jeanine and Doug (the latter two from 212) reported the dastardly deed to me. Two first graders in room 209 did it. Jeanine spoke to them, asking them not to. Leonard said, "They told me they wouldn't pick them, but they *lied*."

I got the two kids and brought them in front of 212 and 214 (Dorothy had not yet planted hers), and said quietly to Ginny, "I've never done this before. Watch me humiliate two children in front of 66 others." I was *terribly* angry.

We're playing Guess My Number with kids as teachers. They enjoy it. It seems to keep them attentive. I like it because I can tell who understands > < and who doesn't.

Before lunch today we walked around the school hanging the posters to advertise *Cinderella*. The kids *do* feel an important part of the production, even though they're not in the play.

I hope to read several versions of *Cinderella* to the kids. I started with Grimm's *Aschenputtle*. I didn't tell them it was Cinderella, but by the third paragraph Sally guessed.

May 5. If it weren't for Marla, Isaac's mom, I'd never have finished the clay for firing. She owns a wholesale ceramic supply business. She really gets upset when she comes in and sees the mess the clay is in. The kids work on it but I don't seem to find the time to do the things I like to do--give the guidance that kids need, fire it, have them glaze it. She is very tactful; it's my own guilt that gets me. She's stayed and worked with the kids a few times and each time there's been an improvement in the care and quality of their work. I know from working so hard on the children's writing, how much they are helped by contact with adults and by conversation about their work. When I had an assistant several years ago who enjoyed working with clay, the work was much better too.

My book order for next year came in already. I used some of the money for two types of Ladybird Books. One kind is a basal (keyword) system, which is very much like those we have in the United States. I'm not too thrilled with them. The others are simplified versions of favorite fairy tales and legends. I opened them immediately, and the children dove for them. I know that over the next few years I'll get the whole set (Follett, too, has sets that I must look into). The books were especially exciting for the nonreaders because they can almost match their spoken words to the written text. I talked a little about how to take care of the books.

Maria and Crystal, two children who were in my room last year (they are in the Rainbow Team this year), wrote me notes asking to visit and help in my class. I wrote back giving day and time. (It is standard practice, if

a child wants to visit another class, to ask permission and to write what she or he will do there.) They started by working with Pam and Atiya, Crystal's sister. But a few minutes after they'd begun, they said that what they *really* wanted to do was to make posters advertising *Cinderella*. So, surrounded by admiring first-grade girls who did the same, they made huge posters.

I wish I could organize these visits on a regular basis. I'd also like my kids to visit older classes, but they've never asked. Perhaps it's too scary. Or perhaps they've simply never thought of it.

May 6. I went to an after-school District 6 Workshop on racism and sexism, sponsored by the Human Relations Committee. There was a good filmstrip and good discussion. Eileen Abrams, the leader, suggested what seem like good resources.*

Most of the participants in the workshop were more concerned about racism than sexism, so Eileen focused on that. Her filmstrip pointed out some ways in which people can decide if books are racist, or if they teach stereotypical ideas about people:

1. Notice the language in which the story is told. Are whites the only ones designated as people, while the rest are called Indians or slaves?
2. Are minorities pictured with stereotyped accessories (feathered head dresses for Indians, serapes and sombreros for Mexicans)?
3. Does a minority person have to be a super human being in order to receive recognition? (I think this one is hard because it is so tied in with the story and what makes any story interesting and what distinguishes one story from another.)
4. Does the minority person speak an inaccurate and demeaning dialect or language?
5. Is the hero a hero for being nice to whites?

Eileen felt that even *bad* books could be used in the classroom with discussion to raise children's consciousness. I think I do this a lot. We can't just throw away the old books.

At 10:30 meeting, I showed the class Foster's and David's work: Foster made a Lego construction which was built on stilts with steps leading to the first floor. It had several levels and passages. He had purposefully made the bottom a garage for his rocket. It was unusual because of the space and I wanted the children to get some ideas from it. Their usual structures are long flat boats or airplanes and no interior space.

David did an exact drawing of Henry's toy firetruck. Every detail was there. There was only one mistake. He spelled oxygen, *negyxo*.

Enrico's English seems not to have progressed. Recently he has begun showing me his writing work only when his list is called. He used to show it to me every day and I'd like to continue that way. But his reading and writing seem to be going nowhere. I'm still letting him

*Council on Interracial Books for Children
1841 Broadway
New York, NY 10023

Now Upon a Time: A Contemporary View of Children's Literature by Myra and David Sadker

New Perspective: A Bibliography of Resources
PA Dept. of Education
Box 911
Harrisburg, PA 17126

get used to English, and holding off with the reading. But I wish I could be sure it's right. He's capable of doing *much* more.

May 7. Sally's mom, Abigail, came in to tell the children about her work. She was very well-prepared. "I work at home. What do you think I do?" *Clean....Take care of the house....Wash the dishes.* "In our house, everyone does the work. No one likes it, so we all do it. I also read, books and newspapers, work in my garden, and go to school to learn.

"My second job is talking to people about schools. (She is currently co-chairperson of the Parents' Union.) If you could change something about this school, what would you do?" *Let us talk in the lunch room. (They don't always have to be quiet.)....Read for a whole hour. We don't read enough....Turn over the desks....Run around all the time until we go home....Have longer Project Time ....Go home after lunch....Have each grade out at a different lunch recess time....Stay in 214 for the whole day....Get water whenever we want, without asking....Have people be quieter....Have more and different things to do at Project Time. I'd like to be able to change my choice and do two things sometimes....I'd like to help Ms. Strieb clean....Eat lunch earlier.*

Abigail told them what other children wish for, and talked about the Parents' Union. Then she told us about her work as a teacher and her one-room schoolhouse and showed us pictures. She also brought us her hand-held school bell.

We finished *Aschenputtle* and I asked the children if they thought it was true. Everyone knew it wasn't. Why not? *There's no such thing as a bird dropping clothes on you....No such thing as a fairy godmother.... You can't cut off your toe or heel or you would die.... Birds can't really talk.*

I read a few of my favorite poems from *A Child's Garden of Verses*. I told them that it was one of my favorites and my husband's favorites when we were little. I told them that the pictures make it look old-fashioned, that the people are rich, and that there are no black people in the book.

I also worked with the beginning readers' group and was pleased to see that they all are starting to figure out rhyming words. Even Foster and Nina are doing it. They enjoy the workbooks, and I don't mind them once in a while.

At the Teachers' Learning Cooperative meeting, Rhoda presented a child who is about to be placed in an LD (Learning Disability) classroom. She expressed all of our doubts and fears about referring children. We want them to have extra help, and smaller classes, but we never can be sure if that's what they'll get. My experience with Ali's brother--in a Socially Emotional Disturbed (SED) class--was that he got hit and was always in the office; Rhoda's with another child--an LD class in which

he was to be taught by a special method. But the teacher says she has no time (with 12 children and an assistant), so he gets still more phonics workbooks.

It's a dilemma for us; we feel so guilty when we see the kids worse off than when they left us.

May 8. I had a discussion with Dr. Silver about Foster. Dr. Silver is an educational evaluator. He tests the children for special placement before a Child Study Evaluation Team (CSET) Meeting.

He was very pessimistic about Foster's progress and prognosis. "He's so far behind. His math concepts are so poor. He can't abstract. His vocabulary--even his mouth formation--is so immature."

I first told Dr. Silver that Foster's mouth was injured in an accident, and that's why it appeared immature to him. Then I pointed out the progress he had made; I mentioned that *I'd* not have made the recommendation for placement because I felt he was mostly just immature. We'd tried to keep him in kindergarten. I feel that he needs another year before he gets the extra help. Dr. Silver talked again about how "these kids" never catch up. How he needs all the extra help he can get as soon as possible. LD placement.

"Full time LD, without retaining him first?"

"Did you ever see a child like this learn to read?"

"Yes. I was surprised, but it happened. What about Resource Room? He needs to stay with his friends. He's so popular and happy."

"Least Restrictive Environment. That's what they call it. Mainstreaming. I guess that would be okay. It's supposed to be desirable."

"I know. I'm on the School District's Advisory Committee. What about retention next year. He'll stay with me. And Resource Room in second grade?"

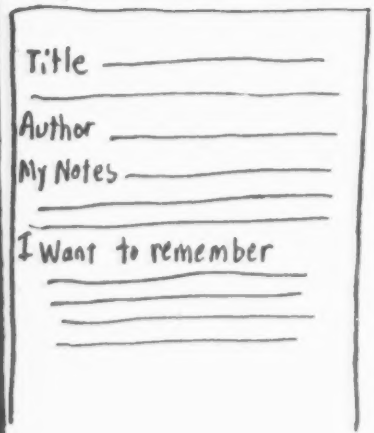
"No. No retention. And Resource Room next year. Don't hold off!"

"I don't agree with you." We went on and on.

You can't convince that man that babies grow up. Only his own children, or children like them, are intelligent. Where do these people come from? And how do we stand up to them?

Children continue to gobble up the Ladybird Fairy Tale Books. They are amazed that they can read them and are pleased. But I'm not surprised. The text is very close to what the children say when they tell these stories in their own words. Some of the better readers are systematically reading each one. Benjamin and Edward started keeping a list of the books they'd read. I made a general announcement that anyone who wanted to do the same, could.

Then I remembered some books I've had stored in the closet for almost six years. They are from Scholastic--part of some paperback reading program. The front part of the book is a blank dictionary for children to insert words they need for writing. The back portion has pages



for little book reports. I dug them out and gave them out with no planning whatsoever. I explained, "After you read a book, you write Title and Author (I showed them where to find both). Then, where it says 'My Notes' and 'I want to remember,' write about the part you like best." It was hard work, but in one day they learned to find the author's name, where to write the words they needed to spell and where to write book reports, and that you have to write a complete sentence.

Ali cried when I insisted he at least try writing the title and author. All the time he was doing it, he cried; but he did it. I called him over to help him with the next step and he continued to cry, writing all the while. He finished with no problem and, to my surprise, said, "Can I do another one?"

Fred Locke from Durham Parent-Teacher Center called to ask me if he could borrow some of the books I've made from the children's writings. He is setting up a display of the many different ways teachers stimulate children to write. The boxful I gave him is 10 years' worth of book making: *Dreams*, *Down South*, *A Graph Book*, *What I Will Be for Halloween*, *All About Indians*, *A Trip to City Hall Tower*, *Fire!*, *When I Was Sick*, and many more.

May 11. For the past few days, William has been writing nonsense stories; he's having trouble getting ideas. I asked the class for suggestions and got many, and William seemed to feel that it helped. I need to find more ways to help kids like William who have written so much this year, but who are running dry. My usual way is to say, "What happened next?" or to give a next sentence, or to say, "That's only the beginning. Something has to happen."

But my concerns grow about limiting the children to writing in these writing books, at a special Writing Time every day, with no possibility of variety at that time.

We've started reading *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* by Beverly Cleary. I've planned it for ages, but got sidetracked by Belinda's *Clever Polly*. Children continue to read and love the Ladybird Fairy and Old Tales books.

I told Diana that I'd like her to read with me today. A few days ago I heard her tell a parent volunteer, "No, I won't read to you. I don't like reading." I've heard her say that before. She's starting to read, but her friends have learned more quickly than she has. So, she leafs through pages of difficult books, not even trying to read, when she *can* read pre-primers. She wants no one to know she's not yet reading as fluently as her friends are.

I suggested she try the Ladybird *Hansel and Gretel*. She knows the story well and she was really able to read/tell most of the book. Whatever she couldn't read, she could pretend to read. She felt so obviously pleased with herself and when she went away, she continued to read it.

Children continue to write *book reports*. Ali said, "Please can I do another one? Please?" I teased him about how he'd changed his mind since yesterday. He got terribly confused about title and author, re-writing yesterday's entries. He must have erased and re-written about eight times, never letting his smile disappear. He finally got it straight.

I never meant for the children to list and report on every book they read, but right now this process is new to them, and they keep doing it. However, for some it has become a competition or a race. Robbie brought me a report on *The Wizard of Oz*, which he'd not yet read. I must have said 10 times, "You must read the book *before* you write your report, even if you know the story. And I'd really like you to choose books you have not yet read this year." But I'm not going to be too rigid about it.

Foster now tells and pretends to read lots of books in the room. I feel that, since his recent psychological evaluation, I'm racing against time to get him to read. But I mustn't let *him* know. His attitude has changed so drastically. When I think that every time he opened a book with me his eyes filled with tears and he said, "I can't read," and now he is so full of enthusiasm, I can't believe it....

May 12. If Nan, Jimmy's mom, hadn't been in school today, I'd never have gotten all the notes run off and into the homework books.

She spoke to the children about her work. She said, "I'm a housewife. Some people call me a homemaker. Do you know what a housewife is?" *She does dishes....She takes care of children....She makes beds....She cleans.*

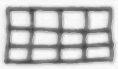
Nan told the children what she does on a typical day while they are in school. She went through the whole day. She said she also plans nutritious meals, helps in school, works in the neighborhood to make it a good place to live, goes shopping. Sometimes she studies in school. "The difference between a housewife and other people who work is that I don't get regular pay for my work. I get money from my husband to run the house, but I don't get a salary."

Then Nan remembered that she also works in her husband's small contracting business as a secretary/bookkeeper. She types, answers the phone, keeps track of money in the books. We remembered that Maria's mom is a secretary and Belinda's mom is a bookkeeper.

In Nan's honor, I read John Ciardi's poem, "When Mommy Slept Late and Daddy Fixed Breakfast," from *You Read To Me, I'll Read To You*--a favorite.

When Ben came to his writing conference this morning he said, "Are you going to read this to the class?" I asked, "Do you want me to?" "Yes." I never do anything with Ben's work or with Ben without first asking his permission. (He has very firm boundaries.) I was pleased and surprised, and at meeting time, I read it. It will probably inspire many other pirate stories.

Some more Paper Bag games. Books, dolls, cars, and (believe it or not) a divining rod which Jill had made. She explained how it works.

We got back to work on multiplication with chips and *arrays*. I'm being very insistent that three times four means three rows of four when using this material, and should be set up:  . I don't know if this is too rigid or not.

Next I'll use plates (discs) and cookies: three times four means We also did harder examples, one times three, three times one.

We've had a rash of cursing in the room. Specifically, the children have been saying, "Fuck you;" or "Tu-tu, Fuck you." Usually, I say to the kids when they report someone else's cursing to me, "If someone curses and you don't like it, you should say, 'I don't like those words. Stop saying them.' But don't come and tell me. When *I* hear them, that's what *I* do." But today, the children were being exceptionally provocative about using the words.

So when we sat down at meeting I said, "I've heard so much cursing today. How many of you know what to do if someone curses? Should you come and tell me? I said what *they* should say. Then (I couldn't believe it) I said, "If *I* hear you say those words, I might wash your mouth with soap. So be careful."

Then the kids gave lots of examples of friends and brothers and sisters who said curse words and what happened. They talked about having seen people writing curse words on bathroom walls. And Pam wrote some on a shelf in our room. They loved talking about cursing.

A radio show of *Star Wars* is aired every Monday at 7. I told the kids about it, knowing that many would *love* to hear it. Then we talked about radio. I told the children about when I was little and there was no television and I listened to radio. I asked, "How do you know what's going on in the story when you can't see the pictures like TV?" Zach said, "When I read a book, the words tell me and I use my imagination."

After reading the article Joan Countryman, head of the math department, wrote in Germantown Friend's *Studies in Education* about the math experiences she feels are important for high school kids, I made a list of the experiences I try to give children in first grade. Then I asked my husband to read the article and tell me what experiences he feels are important for my kids to have. I've heard this before, I know, but it's starting to mean more to me.*

My List: Estimating. Counting (by twos, threes, fives, tens, forward and backward by ones). Recognizing numerals 1-99. Geometry. Size and scale. Mapping. Comparing--graphing; more, less, equivalent. The Operations--addition, subtraction, multiplication, some division of concrete objects (though so many children have trouble with subtraction and especially division that I feel it should be taught later).

Bert's List: Various geometric experiences. E.g.: distinguishing between one, two, and three dimensional

*Children in first grade in Philadelphia are expected to be able to read and write numbers 1-50, and to be able to do written addition and subtraction problems. They are expected to be able to write true number sentences and to be able to read and use the following symbols (+, -, •, >, <). If I had my way I'd hold off on this and do much more mental, not written, solving of problems.

objects; some sense of area, volume, length; some experience with measuring. Estimation. The Operations. That numbers can be associated with the physical attributes of things in various ways, such as objects, inches, heat/cold, time. Graphing. Different number systems.

May 13. Jane, Atiya, Maria, and Bethann made a *mouse house* with blocks on the table. It was so elaborate that they never really had time to put a mouse into it. It had living room, dining room, bedroom, and bathroom. I asked if they thought the mice would use the bathroom, but they missed the humor. I realized that these houses are for people, not mice. Or, the form of house they know is their own. How would *I* make a house for a mouse?

I feel lots of pressures right now. My principal is going through his usual spring rigidity. The play *Cinderella* was given only at night performances, which means that most of the children in the school did not see it. When I complained to him, he started yelling at me.

With all the records I keep, he continues to ask, "How do you know what children do at Project Time?" Even after 10 years of teaching, teachers in our schools still have to write lesson plans for him. If they miss a week, they get notes in their planning books.

Since I write a parents' newsletter every other week, I usually make time for doing lesson plans as well as the newsletter. But last week I wrote him a note: "Given the necessity of choosing between lesson plans and the newsletter, I chose the newsletter." His reply: "Wrong! There should be no necessity for such a choice."

I know he's a supportive principal to us; that others would not let us teach as we do. But sometimes--ugh! Then I think--who praises him? Perhaps he has pressure from the administration. I know he's upset by the possible cuts (5,000 teachers) and what they will do to our school. Class size is supposed to go up to 36.

I keep thinking, I love teaching. I have a firm commitment to public schools. But how can I go along with the constant financial pressure?

The air in the classroom is so stuffy. They're sucking their thumbs and dragging around. They can't seem to hear me. How can I do this for 20 more years?

The children continue to read the easiest books they can in order to write book reports. I remember in fourth grade when I did it. It was a race against myself to see how many books I could read, and against a friend, Francis, just for fun.

May 18. It's always upsetting to come back from an absence and find that the kids hated the substitute. But even more horrible is to find that the substitute hated the class and the routine and philosophy and everything. The parents told me that she couldn't see that the kids were learning. When she saw Jill's writing, she admitted that some of the children must be *bright*. But she never gave any thought to what might have brought the children

to this point in their writing. I suspect she forgot that they were first graders.

I was a little concerned when I took the children to visit the trees. I was sure that, since the trees had all their leaves, there's probably been no change and the children would notice nothing new. I was wrong.

When they looked at the magnolia they noticed the different shades of green of the leaves: *When there are lots of leaves they look darker.* They noticed some places where no leaves had opened and thought that part of the tree must be dead. They commented on the texture of the bark and found slashes in it that we'd never seen before. Someone said that the color of the magnolia bark reminded them of birch....

May 19. The children had settled into writing when I put the cage with my King snake and a mouse on the middle of the floor and told the children that, if they wished, they could come see the snake eat. Most came (except Mark, Ben, Ali, Henry, and Sally who chose to continue writing). I love seeing them sitting around the snake, watching and talking.

The snake had to work hard to catch the mouse. The mouse kept jumping as the snake attacked it, and with every leap, the children shrieked. When the mouse was finally caught they screamed, "E-e-ew. It's eating the eyeball!" They noticed that the snake bit itself when it missed the mouse. It twisted itself many times around the mouse, more than I'd ever seen.

Even after most of the children had returned to writing, a smaller group, Atiya, Reggie, Leonard, Tonya, and Tami stretched out and conversed in a very relaxed way. I just listened. They talked about what they would do if they were the snake or mouse--how high they would jump, how fast they would move. When the snake finished eating, someone said, *That snake can't hardly move.*

Leonard told me that the snake is 44 years old. When I asked him how he knew that he said, "I counted the stripes."

Tami yelled, "Look at the snake. It's having a bowel movement!" I'd never seen that before. She lifts her tail from the anus to the tip, holds it stiff, and out comes the feces.

We compared Pam's snake and my snake. I did bring worms and found a little cage for the garden snake. Everyone sat around and watched. The snake is frisky and couldn't be left without being held. I asked the children to think about comparing the two snakes--what's the same, what's different:

Both Snakes: stick out their tongues, move around, can crawl all over, eat, drink, have no legs, have skinny tails, have holes at the back of the tails to go to the bathroom, have eyes, give off yellow stuff, have tips of tails that are the same size.

King Snake: yellow and black, stripes, eats mice, bigger, name: King, bigger cage, longer, head color black

and yellow, can't slip out of your hands, can eat the deKay, bigger mouth, bumpy, not moving, feels different, from California, older.

Garden Snake: gray, spots, eats insects, smaller, name: deKay, smaller cage, shorter, head color is gray, can slip out of your hands, can't eat King, smaller mouth, smooth, moving, feels different, from Pam's garden, younger.

I noticed that the children mentioned many more differences than similarities. I wonder: Is that because difference stands out more--is more obvious--or because once you give two things the same name (snake) you are acknowledging their similarities? Is it developmental? Is it my training? I remember when my own kids called all four-legged animals *doggie*, when they were learning to talk. The children in my class are getting so adept at seeing detail and difference. But I don't want them to lose sight of the whole.

Over the weekend three mice had babies--28 of them. Only seven had been born in school, but that makes 11 in the cage. I told the children we couldn't keep all of them. I asked if they'd rather I feed the babies or the larger mice to the snake. They felt strongly that the larger mice should go.

More practice with multiplication: draw pictures for these problems: 2 x 3 4 x 1 etc.

Catherine, Robbie's baby sister, visited again. *She's changed.* I asked the children, "In what ways has she changed?" *The sound she makes....She crawls and sits now....She has teeth....She's bigger.* Then I said, "Mrs. Green told me that Katie can clap hands. Maybe if you do it, she'll do it too." So 32 kids in a circle clapped hands, while Katie sat in the middle. I couldn't see, but Mrs. Green said she was laughing. Then I made a motion for the children to stop clapping, saying, "Let's watch what Katie does."

Instead of clapping, Katie shook her arms, waved her hands, and made a sound. She did it about three times. I signaled for the children to clap again and then to stop. Once again Katie moved her arms furiously. By the third time, the children realized that she was telling them exactly what she wanted them to do. They loved the game and continued for quite a while. Katie never clapped for us.

May 20. Pam's grandmother has taken to visiting our class once in a while for a few minutes. She has already brought candy for the kids. Yesterday she brought about five games and a beautiful bouquet of irises. First thing today we sat down and described them. I was

determined that the children would be specific today. "If you say 'here there's light purple,' I will ask you 'where is here?' If you say 'stuff,' I'll ask you to give it a name. Pretend I can't see where 'here' or 'down there' is. You need to say exactly where."

THE IRIS

*It is purple....It smells good....It's purple and white ....The top is light purple, dark purple hangs down.... Blue petals on top, purple on the bottom....Some is getting old. It grew already and got old....It has a green stem....There is a leaf coming on the left side down on the bottom....The fur feels funny....When the flowers fall off, it gets brown....The hanging down petals are soft, the top ones aren't....It's wet at the bottom.... There are purple, black and white 'leaves' under the flower....It has a wrapper that makes it so you can't see the stem. It has an oval shape that you can't[...] anything in it. It is cracked....Inside it is red and yellow....It's all green down at the bottom....It has pebbles inside....The flower at the top looks like a mouth....If you look inside, it looks like a tunnel.... On top of the white fur, there is yellow....*Mark said, *In the inside, there's three things that sort of look like balloons. Altogether there's three three's. That's nine. Three hanging down petals, three standing up petals, and three balloons....The petals that are sticking up have three little petals inside. They're white, but the top of the white petal is light purple....The soft part is yellow. Up on the top and bottom is crunchy.... Up at the top of the other stem, it looks dead. It's crumpled up....*

It's interesting how Mark carried over the math from the dogwood discussion and made a multiplication problem.

Tonya arrived just as we'd finished describing the iris. Belinda said, "Wait, we have to give Tonya a turn." By now the children had become restless, and so I said, "We really need to stop now. But Tonya will have a turn at describing the flower. I'll ask her to draw a picture of it. You know, drawing something is a really good way to describe something. And Tonya does *that* so well." As I expected, Tonya's drawing was exact and full of detail.

After searching through several craft books yesterday, Tami and Sally decided to make paper dolls. I helped by lightly making an outline of a figure and then told them to color hair, a face, a bathing suit or underwear or a jogging suit. "And don't forget the skin. If she's to be like you, she needs brown skin."

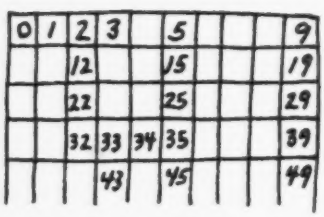
After the coloring was finished, I drew a dark outline, and they cut the doll out. Then I showed them how to make the clothes (somehow we *all* forgot about the book).

Several other children asked for help making paper dolls. Today Leonard did--the first boy to do so. (My

husband said that one of his favorite childhood pastimes was dressing paper dolls. I told Leonard this.) He came to me and said, "What color crayon should I use to make a white doll? White skin isn't really white." I told him to bring me the crayon box and I'd show him the color most people use for white skin. Tami was at the table when I showed the color to Leonard. (It's called *peach* not *flesh* as it was when I was little.) Tami said that her artist-brother uses that color a lot.

The clean-up of the block corner has been *horrible*. For many months the children have been enjoying spending a full week in the blocks--starting on Monday, leaving buildings up and continuing to work on them until Friday's clean-up. Lately, though, there's been a mess in the blocks, and they have asked to change activities before the week is up. But some buildings remain, kids who continue to work there knock them down, and little plastic people get stepped on and destroyed.

After lunch I sent the whole class to finish cleaning the blocks and then I asked everyone to sit down in the block corner. I told the class that I was going to take away the plastic people because too many had been destroyed. I reminded them of the things they could work with, showing them where each belongs--Lego box, unfinished Lego structures, pattern blocks, tiles, objects for sorting. Finally, I told them that from now on, if they leave their block structures up then they must work on them the next day. If they don't want to do that, then they must put the blocks away.



I drew half of a 10 x 10 square on the board and said, "Now everyone must be quiet, and only the people I call on may speak." I wrote 0 in the first square, pointed to another square along the top horizontal line, and then pointed to a child, who answered 5. Instead of going by one's, I went to the square below 5, the one below that and below that, asking with my eyes, what number I should put in the space. I continued pointing at random squares, but then often went up or down on a verticle line. When the spaces 0-49 were finally filled in, I asked, "What do you notice about this?" (I have generalized the observations.) *The numbers going down have the same number, like under five there is a long line of fives....The numbers on the left going down, go up by one....If you're going along left to right, each number is one more than the one before it....When you go this way, the numbers get higher; the other way they get lower....All the tens on each line are the same. Like in the 20s they all have two tens.*

May 21. Mary, Henry's mom, came to tell about her work as director at the local credit union. It was a hard job to explain and she was fine. She forgot to say what a loan is, but once we explained it, it was okay.

I'm trying so hard to get the arithmetic books marked. It's been a constant problem--keeping up with them. The kids would move much further and faster if

only I could get them marked. I think that's where I most miss having an assistant. Or I *must* get a better system.

A *very* calm morning. Some children started making pattern block designs and then pasted pre-cut shapes on paper, matching that design. (Another map?) The pattern blocks haven't really been used all year. Paul made a clay rocket. It was a little like a slab house.

May 22. It was too beautiful to stay in, so I decided to take the kids to Fern Hill Park. We got a late start, but had fun. The maple seeds were all over the ground, and the kids spent lots of time picking them up and putting them on noses. There were loads of flowers to look at. A man with a *huge* dog walked past us, and I asked the children to think about how they knew it was a dog and not a horse. I promised we'd talk about it later.

The behavior was odd. A kindergarten class was already at the playground when we got there, and there was lots of pushing and very little sharing. I supervised a dodgeball game which didn't work out. Sometimes I think first graders are a little young for dodgeball. They get terribly insulted when they are hit out, and they have trouble working as a team.

When we got back to school we had the promised discussion about the big dog. Bert and I talked tonight about how much better the children appear to discern differences. I still feel they see the similarities first--animal, tree, flower. Once those general names are given, it's easier to talk about difference within.

May 26. I'm rushing to get the math Levels Tests done by this Friday's deadline. It gets me terribly anxious and upset because I don't teach math in the order given in the test.

I taught the children the following for the test: What is the opposite of hot? (cold). What is the opposite of up? (down), etc. What is the opposite of addition? It's interesting how many children will say *plus*, or *adding*, either completely mixing up the meaning of *opposite* or not really understanding the terms *addition*, *adding*, *plus*, *add*. Sometimes I need to remind myself that it is plus-minus, adding-taking away, addition-subtraction.

Then, I just taught the test. I gave different numerals, but the same form: 3 + 5 = 8 How would you write the opposite? Here, you're putting three and five together. How can you do the opposite?

The test says: Do: 3 + 5 = 8 Undo: 8 - 5 = 3 or 8 - 3 = 5. But subtraction really is not *undoing*. This again raises the question for me of what's important to learn/teach. It comes up over and over again as I confront math levels tests and reading criterion-referenced tests.

California Achievement Test results came back. My usual response to seeing them is to first look to make

sure that the children who *needed* to get above the 90th percentile, did. By that I mean the ones whose parents would be furious if the child were not eligible for the Mentally Gifted Program. Then I look to see that those who *needed* to be Non-Title I, were. Then I look to see whose scores dropped from kindergarten (always too many). Finally, I have to convince myself that test scores don't matter; that my kids learn at a different pace from what the test makers expect; that in other classes the children have the same range of scores as in mine; that next year the scores will be better; etc. But it never helps. Usually I end up feeling that the high scorers learned from their parents, so I can't take credit for their scores; but I didn't do a good job teaching the lower scorers. *Their* scores are my fault. I'm *never* sure of what I'm doing. The test always creates doubt.

I feel so lethargic lately; but worse, along with my lethargy, I'm afraid my teaching is turning dull--no interesting projects. The same old things are going on --drawing, blocks, games, Lego. No sewing or book-making. Is it the time of year or the time of my life for me to feel this way?

I'm starting to make plans for the end of the year. I want to clean out all desk drawers; to sort out all old ditto masters and worksheets in the file cabinet; to get rid of all the unused forms; to sort out 10 years of boxes that say "desk" on them, and get rid of what I haven't used; to get rid of stuff I've been saving in case I teach a higher grade because I know if I ever need it I'll find it again.

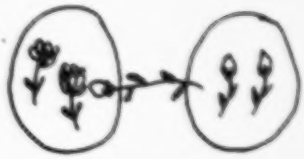
May 27. My last few roses were blooming, and I wanted to have some in the classroom. I'd hoped to have enough for one for each child, but there were not enough in my yard. Though I was almost late, I decided to take the time to get more. I picked some three-petaled purple flowers from the garden next door, and then stopped at Henry's house, where I got permission to pick as many roses as I needed.

As the children came in, I told them quietly to put homework books away, and ceremoniously handed each child a flower whispering, "Sit down in a circle, please, and no talking." When everyone was seated, I reminded the children, one at a time, to put their roses near those that are the same. If none is the same, they could make new sets. The children remembered playing this game with feathers and leaves and buttons, so I didn't have to spend a lot of time explaining what they should do.

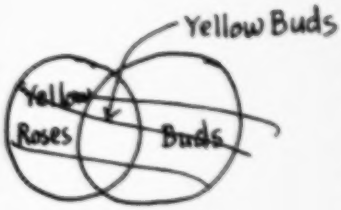
As usual, there was complete silence. (I broke the silence when Lloyd simply plopped a flower down without even looking. I know him and know how difficult it is for him to pay attention, so I insisted that he pick up his flower, look at all the piles, *then* put it down.) When all the flowers had been placed on the floor I asked the children if they wanted to say something about the sets.

We had sets of the following: all the red roses, yellow roses and buds, all the white flowers (roses and mock oranges), purple flowers, pink and orange roses (one), and pink and orange buds (one). Then I asked if anyone wanted to change anything around. They put all the buds together in a set and the pink and orange rose and bud together in a separate set because "there's only one of them in each set."

There was a little argument about where the yellow buds belonged--with the set of yellow roses, or with the set of buds. Children in turn kept moving them from one place to another, just as I'd hoped. So I got some string and made two loops. I put two loops on the floor and put the yellow roses into one and the orange bud into the other. "What shall we do with the yellow buds?" I asked. Some children kept moving them from one circle to another. Finally Jill made a bridge from one circle to another with them.

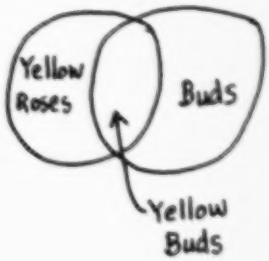


Then I asked if there was a way to move the string. Henry did it so that the strings overlapped. That was quite hard for many of the children to see. I'll play a Guess My Rule game with the diagrams already set up. I could do it with either attribute/logic blocks, or with buttons.



Anyway, the rose sorting turned out beautifully. I reminded the children that they could draw the flowers at Project Time. And once again Tonya did. I was also impressed with David's drawing, which focused in detail on the leaves and stem, but left out the flowers. He started with one leaf and made a beautiful drawing.

We went to see our garden at Jane's house. We pulled weeds, planted pumpkins, and transplanted sunflowers. Kids got to play on equipment. But there was not really enough time. We'll come back next week to plant some more, then we'll have a picnic here the following week. In mid-June, we'll come back to pick our vegetables for salad.



May 28. I started teaching a little about place value. Most of the children have worked with Cuisinaire rods, so they know that an orange rod equals 10 whites. I showed one orange rod and said, "How many ones is this worth?" (10). "Two longs are worth how many whites?" (Twenty), etc.

Then, I started to write it on the board. Forty looks like this , 45 looks like this . Then I drew and asked someone to write how many 10s and ones that shows.

I don't really know what else to do except to keep showing the children the pattern in as many ways as possible: with orange and white rods, with bean sticks, with lines (| • is 11), with unifix, with circles, bundles of sticks and rubber bands, etc.

This is just an introduction for this year. Next year, I'll begin with having the children write numerals 1-1000, using the Cuisinaire rods, flats, and blocks.

It will clinch all of the experimenting and playing around they've done this year with trading games.

May 28. I'd told the children that if they had any flowers on their lawns, they should bring them in, with permission, of course. Felicia brought in a plastic flower. I wonder if it was her idea or her mother's. We passed it around and described it.

On these hot days, when the air conditioner is not working and what windows we have won't open, I sometimes have to change the schedule for the children's comfort and my own. I change Project Time to the afternoon. Even though the children are more active, they're not quite so hot because they're so involved in what they're doing.

June 1. We had a big to-do Thursday and Friday. Tonya's mother accused Ben of hitting her daughter on the way out of school on Thursday. She was also upset because he'd once said to her, "Your daughter doesn't have any friends," and then stuck his tongue out. Though Ben denied it and Mrs. Green agreed to let me handle it, she came to the school yard on Friday and, according to Atiya, "Mrs. Green started running after Ben. She hit him with her pocketbook, too. She said that if he ever hit Tonya again she would lay him flat on the ground." Ben ran away from school and went home. (He'd been given a house key a few days earlier by his working parents.)

Mrs. Green told me that Tonya hardly slept Thursday night, that she had vomited, and that she had trouble breathing because of her asthma. I told Mrs. Green that I felt Tonya was upset because she (her mother) was so upset. If Mrs. Green had been calm, Tonya would have been calm.

I got someone to cover for me and, after reminding the children of the words they should say if someone teases them, I went across the street to Ben's house, where a next-door neighbor let me in. Ben was there alone in the bathroom, sobbing. He surprised me by coming out of the bathroom after my first gentle request, and he further surprised me by wanting me to pick him up and hold him. (Ben usually does not like to be touched.) After he calmed down, we went back to school. I assured him that he wouldn't have to talk to the kids about it right away.

After lunch at our usual discussion time, Ben's story was corroborated by the other children. We talked again about teasing and then I asked the children to say one thing they think they could do well. That ended things on an up.

Over the weekend, Ben's mother called to say that she and his father had decided the school couldn't allow parents to take matters into their own hands like that, that conditions in the school yard were unsafe if an accident like that could happen, and that they were going

to speak to the Principal. She said she believes her son because he never lies, even when it means punishment for him. "He's the kind of kid who would say, 'Yeah, I hit her. And I'm sorry I didn't hit her harder,' if he'd done it."

I told the Principal about the incident and after his usual initial angry reaction--"That parent needs to know that she could be sued! I should call the police." --he calmed down and agreed to send a general note to parents about reporting such incidents and letting the school take care of them.

Today Ben, Tonya, and Paul had to go to the library together and I suggested they talk to one another going and coming. While they were gone, I realized that since Tonya has very little chance to do things independently outside of school, I should find many errands for her to run inside the school.

Later today Mrs. Green showed me a note she'd written to me:

Dear Mrs. Strieb,

I'm sorry about all that happened last week. Tonya is sorry too. She said that now she thinks Ben and her can be friends. She promised to tell you if anyone bothers her. She wanted me to write you this note.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Green

Then she said, "You know, I really do like this class, and I'm glad Tonya is in it. They really were good on Thursday when I was there helping them write. They write good. And they kept busy without talking or fighting." I told her how glad I was that Tonya was in this class, how much less shy she'd become, and how talented she is. "She's a *very* special girl. And the children know it."

We visited the trees but didn't see too much that was new. When we got to the beech, we looked at it from a distance for a while, then I led the children to the edge of the shadow under it. Since it was about noon, the shadow was approximately the size of the bottom of the tree. Leonard was the leader, and I told him to walk right on the edge of the shadow. I told the rest of the children to follow Leonard in a line. It was like a beautiful procession.

The routine/schedule has become so boring--boring to me and, I think, boring to the children, too. Each subject is separate from the other. Writing is separate from the Project. Few children would dare choose to do math or read a book at Project Time with all those toys around. It's not that they aren't learning. I know I can never *really* tell when they're learning, and they're *always* learning. And the choices are just the same every day. No one asks for anything new. There's no adventure or long-term projects.

I'm thinking right now of keeping all commercially-made objects (people, games, Lego) out of the room next year and insisting that the children make their own toys and games. (Actually, they probably will at least make their own games next year.)

After school Rhoda, Judy Buchanan, and I went to Children's Village Child Care Center to help with a Staff Review. I really do love what I learn from Staff Reviews. It felt a little funny because the three of us were the only ones who made recommendations, but the director felt it was fine. Since the focus was preparing a child for entering a first grade, the teachers needed people who could give very specific help. I didn't realize that child care workers don't know a lot about teaching academic subjects. They seemed so grateful when we told them about the different kinds of books they could make for the child; about showing him how much he already could read (logos, trademarks).

The director, Esther Cristol, feels a next step might be my coming for a day to talk to the teachers about writing, dictation, and book-making. If she asks me, I'll be glad to do it.

I finished reading *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* by Beverly Cleary, which the children loved. Zachary brought a motorcycle to school and I asked him to show it to everyone. One of the children said, "Let's get a mouse and put it on the motorcycle!" I asked the class if it was a true story or not a true story, and something bad happened.

Ali has a very difficult time participating in group discussions and listening to stories. He often falls asleep during stories, never listens, and never answers questions. Often, when asked a question which demands some inference, he merely stares into space. Knowing all this, especially his difficulty answering questions, I insisted that he answer the question. He refused to take a guess. I repeated it several times, and really got angry. I know he knows the difference between fiction or at least a story that is clearly absurd, and a true story. He ended up crying, and I ended up disturbed by my angry behavior.

Maria's Aunt Bobbie has been coming over from Ginny's room when Ginny reads to her kids. She has been a terrific help--filing and sorting. What a relief to have someone to do this. It's so hard for me to ask for help because I never know what to ask people to do, and sometimes it takes more time than doing it myself. But I guess I'm ready.

Homework--Old SRA worksheets. Pictures and problems □ x 3 = 9. I tell them to say, "How many sets (groups) of three equals nine?"

June 3. I tried to let the children know some of the plans for the end of the year--cleaning up, putting things away, trying to continue the work we're doing, getting all the papers marked and stories typed. I told

them that they will have to know how to work calmly at Project Time because I will be working on cleanup.

I also announced the family picnic, on Sunday, June 14, in Fern Hill Park. In other years, we've had picnics there, but I'd never really prepared for it with the children. We kind of just knew where we'd meet, and then we'd meet there. I usually brought a 5-gallon container of Italian water ice to share, and that was about it. This year I wanted the children to do some of the planning. We had a meeting and they asked some good questions: *Will you send notes home?....Will we take a bus?....Can my brother come?....Can my father come?.... What if you forget?....Can you bring pets?....My mom doesn't know about it....Can we bring a friend?....Can we go on Indian Trails?....*

I assured them that we would send a note home telling the parents about the picnic. If they wanted to bring cousins, friends, and pets, it would be up to their parents, since their parents would have to take care of them, not me.

They suggested cookies, popcorn, potato salad, fruit salad, applesauce, egg salad, and toffee as things we could cook. I told them we would have a clothesline art exhibit with their pictures.

June 4. I'm blessed with parents. Three came to help with writing this morning--they spell words, check stories, have conversations, help with math. Abigail, Sally's mom, has been helping Nina with her handwriting. Her great patience has worked, and Nina is moving quickly. Nina's birthday is the last day before the deadline for first grade and the Principal would not allow her to remain in kindergarten. She's bright and adorable, and simply not ready for first grade. But this year, she has had the second kindergarten experience that she needed. Now she's rarin' to go. Just ready for handwriting and number work, dying to read. Abigail helped her so much with this.

I need calm and quiet. The children talk so much and sometimes I just can't get them to work. I love the relationships that are built when desks are pushed together, and when six kids sit at a table. But at times like this, when I need quiet and want to see people working without distraction, I'm sorely tempted to make rows with everyone facing front. I really only need rows when children are doing the more formal, independent work--writing, sustained silent reading, math worksheets. But to move furniture around each day as we did during testing would be too much for me.

It's only seven children who are distracted by being near others--Atiya, Paul, Leonard, Reggie, Bethann, Felicia (sometimes), and Pam. Maybe next year I'll be able to give them their own isolated desks for such times. Whenever I isolate them, I say, "I'm not punishing you. I just want to help you to get your work done."

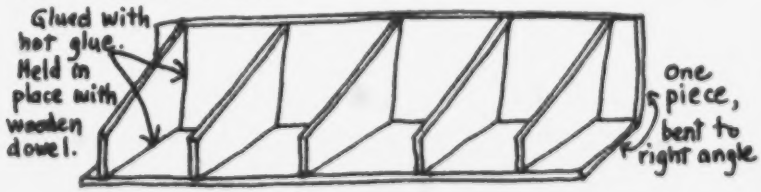
Generally I get the kids quiet by saying, "No talking, now," several times, then yelling it, then saying, "If you talk, I'll send a note home telling your parents that you're talking instead of doing your work." I'm not happy with this, and need to find a way of establishing quiet. Yet I guess I'm not sure I *want* silence. The conversation is so good and intellectually stimulating for children. I guess what I wish is for silence when I ask for it. That's impossible, because not talking is really inconsistent with what I've demanded all along. (It's the same problem when I try to enforce silent reading. I've encouraged social reading. Then, when I ask them to be silent, they can't do it.)

I've been reading what Leslie Stein of Central Park East School in New York City said when she was interviewed about her curriculum by Courtney Cazden. The interview accompanies the film, *We All Know Why We're Here*. Leslie talks about how she chooses and introduces themes, and about why she uses them. They seem to give her the structure or order she needs. Generally they are in content areas, and her Project or Choice time work usually (though not always) has some connection to the theme. I also read Rosanne Kessens' article on starting a thematic approach in *Insights*.

I've never really done a big content theme that has integrated Project Time and all the reading and math, though size and scale (small things) was getting close to it. The seasons could, I guess, legitimately be called a theme, but I don't really carry it over into Project Time. Perhaps it will help to watch what content the kids work with when they draw and build, and see if there's a possibility there. I feel that this class could sustain interest in a content area over time.

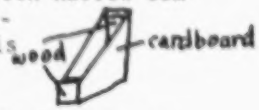
I'll have to think more about whether we *do* themes or not. Looking over my records at the end of the year will help.

In my desperate search for order for the books, I've developed a new storage unit. This one creates upright dividers for the metal shelves we all have. Without them, the books just flop over and look terribly sloppy. In our library we have expensive wood and masonite supports. Peter Wood designed them of tri-wall at the Teachers' Center.



Kate Guerin and I have made about twenty-five of them for other colleagues and ourselves, and now that we have them, we wonder how we could ever have gotten along without them.

First it was tri-wall bookshelves with narrow compartments; then it was this special holder for paper pre-primers. Now this. This has been the best for me so far.



Now all I have to do is to find a way to get the kids to read the books. There are *so* many. But that's another matter.

June 5. The notes with requests for suggestions about the picnic came back from the parents. They suggested face painting, relay races for all ages, bringing an extra drink and ice to share, and putting all food together to share.

I talked with Harriet Ballard, who's a well-respected traditional teacher in our school. She's been teaching first grade for *30 years!* Thirty years at the same thing. Of course, it's never really the same. She's asked to keep her current class for another year. This will be her first time at second grade.

Today we had a very calm walk to the garden. I didn't realize how tense I am when Leonard and Reggie are with me on a walk. I didn't realize until I left them behind. On our last walk, they were trying to push ahead of others and ran into the street.

We pulled lots of weeds and ate some lettuce. Each child got one pea. Ms. Rose had thoughtfully made some Kool-Aid for us.

I did begin work on the closet. I've put away cloth, drawers with puzzles and games, some science equipment, and some books. I'm trying to concentrate on how much has been put away, not on how much is still left in the room.

June 7. I've been thinking about what I've been reading this year. I rarely finish anything, but it all bubbles around inside--some of it surfacing in my practice. Currently I'm reading *The School in Rose Valley* by Grace Rotzel, who was the headmistress at that school for many years.

Edie Klausner* lent me another book by Rotzel about nature at Rose Valley. It's called *Twelve Turnings.*** I'm afraid I won't get to it until summer, but I've glanced through it. I wish that somehow this beautiful book could be available again.

Other books I've been reading and re-reading recently: *The Recovery of Man in Childhood* by A. C. Harwood, *Playing with Infinity* by Rozsa Peter, OUTLOOK magazine, *Man and His Symbols* by Carl Jung, et al., The Nuffield Math Guides, The ESS Reader and Guides, *Talks for Primary School Teachers* by Madeleine Goutard, *Interview with Leslie Stein* by Courtney Cazden. I never finish anything, but little-by-little things seep in.

Another way that ideas seep in is through my discussion with Bert. Over the years, I've found that there's been some change in my understanding of math and science. Years ago, I'd ask him a question and I'd be

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**Excerpts appeared in OUTLOOK, Winter 1983, Vol. 50.

lost as soon as he'd start an explanation. I don't know if he's become better at explaining, or if I really do understand more since attending seminars at Prospect, from my incidental reading, and from hearing the explanations again and again. But I am generally able not only to keep up with him but also to ask fairly sensible questions.

Bert feels that one of the reasons I've had so much trouble understanding current scientific ideas is that I haven't taken the time to learn about the history of these ideas. For example, he says it's important to know something about Classical Mechanics in order to gain some understanding of Quantum Mechanics.

Last summer I read *Einstein for Beginners* by Joseph Schwartz and Michael McGuinness and found that it helped me understand much that had been a mystery to me.

These discussions with Bert have helped me in considering what sort of science experiences might be important for children, and have added to knowledge which I, too many other teachers, and people in general, not only lack but also fear. I wish I had time to do more reading. If I ever take a sabbatical, I'm going to try to sit in on his course.

June 8. Now that school is almost over, and I'm feeling a little more relaxed, I'm less rigid at writing time. I told the children that, if they wished, they could do any of the following writing projects, just as long as they finish what they start:

- Their usual writing book or drawing/writing book.
- Draw a picture with magic markers and write a story to go with it on another paper.
- Draw a long frieze on adding machine paper. You may do it with a friend and then write the story together.
- Make a book. I showed them all the different kinds of paper available for simple book-making.
- Any other writing project you might think of.

The children seemed quite happy with the chance to choose, and I think that as long as I have a place for them to put finished work, I'll be able to keep track of it, even with the lack of uniformity. (That's why I've stuck with writing books for so long. They're the same size, and it's easier for me.)

It was interesting to see who of the children stuck with the writing books (Ali, Reggie, Tami, Tonya, and David). Many chose to do friezes.

I held up a vase filled with dead roses. The children briefly took turns (informally) talking about the change from red to purple, and the crunchy sound that dead leaves and petals make when you walk on them or squeeze them in your hand.

I described a bike accident I witnessed yesterday in which a boy who sped down a hill and went through a red light was hit by a car. I told the children about it because I wanted them to think about bike safety. They, in turn, told many stories of friends who had bike

accidents, of accidents they had been in, and how safely they ride. I suggested they tell their stories in writing, too.

June 9. Belinda brought Deborah, a seven-year-old visitor from Coventry, England. Sitting in a circle, we talked for a while. The children found England on the globe as we reviewed what they knew about geography. They knew that an island is land with water all around it, but I know they had some other notions about islands. I explained about England being a very big island with many large cities comparable to Philadelphia. There was some confusion about the words island and Ireland. Then I asked the children to listen very carefully when Deborah spoke, suggesting she might sound a little strange to them. "We speak English, and *she* speaks English; but the *way* we speak it sounds different from the way she does. We speak with different accents. We use the same words, but they sound different. Roberto has a different accent, too. He says the sound of "r" like this..."

Two librarians from the Friends' Free Library visited and spoke to the class in 212 and us. They invited children to join the vacation reading club. I really should make an effort to take the kids to that library before school ends. Perhaps we could go to Jane's house in the morning, have a picnic there, and then go to the library after lunch (it's so close). It would *also* be nice to meet some children at the beginning of the vacation and take them there a few times. I used to do that.

Writing time was *very* relaxed today as children continued the new routine. Yesterday's unfinished stories were finished, and everyone knew just where to place finished work. I'm glad I tried this. Maybe I'll continue it next year.

June 10. There's a parent who occasionally brings her children to school, who is an Orthodox Muslim. She is very tall, and covers every part of her body, except her eyes. Today the children noticed her and asked, *What's that?* and, *Why is she dressed that way?* I asked them if they wanted to talk about it when we got up to the room, and they did:

"That woman who was wearing tan robes belongs to the Muslim religion. (Leonard: *What's religion?*) Sometimes people believe in God and want to pray. So they go to special places to pray like a church. They are Catholic or Jewish or Baptist, or Muslim--that's their religion." There were lots of interruptions about where the children pray and what religion they are. Some said, *I don't believe in God.* "This woman believes in the Muslim religion, and her religion tells her that women must keep every part of their bodies covered--their heads, their arms, and faces--except when they are at home. Only their husbands and children are allowed to see their faces." *Why? That's not fair!* "Well it may not seem fair to you, but many people choose to be Muslims and to

dress that way. (Mark: *Why on earth would anyone want to dress like that?*) I guess it doesn't seem quite fair to me, either, since the men are allowed to wear short-sleeved shirts.

"Anyway, if you travel to those places, it won't look so strange to you because so many people will be dressed like that. *You'll* be the different one." (I should have taken out the book *People*.)

I borrowed the goslings from the Rainbow Team. We sat in a circle and watched them for a while, laughing at their antics, talking quietly about what they were doing, and asking questions. Mostly, the children wanted to know if they were male and female, and if they would lay eggs. I didn't know. They began by talking about one of the goslings. About two-thirds of the way around the circle, they began to talk about both of them: *They peck themselves with their mouths....They're sleeping.... When they get big they lay eggs....They are scratching on the side....It looks like you could just pull their head off....Where the leg stops you can't see the orange part. You can see the top part (the thigh)....If they don't have ears, how can they hear?....Where did you get them?....They have little wings....They are in the shape of an "L" when they sit down....Their eyes are like little marbles....When they lie down, their body in back looks like a hill....Sometimes when they lie down together, it looks like one body and two heads.*

And then they began to intersperse their descriptions of goslings with the other animals in the room: *It doesn't have four legs like a guinea pig....You can't see its head when it lays down....Guinea pigs and geese sound the same....Their eyes are closed....Its head is like a ball....If we be quiet they'll go to sleep....It looks like a pillow....When it lays down it looks like it has no legs....Any animal doesn't have the same feet except ducks. There was some discussion about this. Belinda said, "What about frogs?"....The legs look like an old lady's arm with yellow for a coat....If you pet their backs, you go over a bump....The snake has no legs, the goose does....Our hamster and the goslings have the same fur....It has a pink tongue....They have no tails like mice do.*

Isaac brought in the 3-string dulcimer he made. He described the materials he used and exactly how he constructed it (in *endless* detail. It always happens when he speaks to the class. And yet his writing is surprisingly spare.).

I have been sticking to my cleaning list.

June 11. Parents were to have come in for a meeting about the picnic, but only Enrico's and Jimmy's parents made it. We agreed that each family should bring its own food and extra drink to share. Henry's mom agreed to take care of races, Robbie's mom will paint faces and arms....

Project Time was fascinating today. Ali, Atiya, Tami, and Bethann sat in a circle on the floor and played with the snake. They needed to be told how to hold it loosely with both hands, but not to let it go. I do worry that it will get away.

The children have been enjoying the small colored blocks all year long. They've built farms, buildings, and garages. In April, Robbie and Belinda began to make elaborate ramps, combining the wedges from the larger hardwood block set. The children like to run their cars down the ramps. Still, these structures were rather contained.

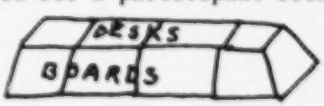
Today, Edward and Mark built the fanciest road system yet. It covered the whole meeting space, and by clean-up time, they were constructing towers. Mark said, "We should make a whole city." In fact, it already looked like a city with a wide road with structures all along it. I promised that they could continue tomorrow. I wish I had time to draw it. I think it's going to be quite influential, as were the first ramps.

Isaac asked if he could "do magic." There was the usual performance problem. The *magician* doesn't rehearse, but immediately wants to give a show and calls everyone over. The *audience* gives away the tricks, runs behind the stage and acts up, won't sit down, won't shut up. The *magician* yells at everyone and the commotion brings me over.

"The audience is supposed to sit down and watch. It's not polite to talk. Let Isaac take his turn, then he'll give you a turn. Isaac, you have to know what you're doing, otherwise your audience will get bored and start to talk."

Isaac had taken some stacking tri-wall boards which I use as drying-shelves for paintings:

He had leaned them up against some desks in front of the room, and had created a tunnel. He asked for a participant from the audience



(bedlam) and said, with a flourish, "I shall make him disappear. I shall magically make him change places." He lifted the *door* and Ben crawled in.

"Abracadabra." After waiting a moment, Isaac lifted the entrance and Ben was gone. We could hear him crawling through the tunnel.

"Aw. He's just crawling through. That's dumb."

"Abracadabra. Now I've made you appear." Isaac opened the exit. There was Ben.

It might have been dumb, but everyone wanted a turn. I promised more tomorrow.

June 12. The Principal invited comments from the children about Play Day. I explained to the children that since they all had made comments about it to me yesterday,

it might be nice for them to send letters to the Principal telling him in writing how they felt about the day. I'd never shown them the letter form, and they were confused about that. But they understood the form by the second copy. Mostly they wanted the time outside to be longer, and to have had a chance to do more than just have races and play with the parachute. (They love gym when they go from tumbling, to ropes, to horse, to ladder, to bar. And they expected some rotation like that.) It will be interesting to see the Principal's response.

Edward's mother Joann and her friend Sue did a special assembly program for us and for room 204. They are both music students at Philadelphia Community College and Joann teaches piano using the Suzuki method. First there were piano performances by Felicia and Isaac, while Edward and Enrico displayed large illustrations which they had made for the performance. Sue sang about five songs for the children, including a Mozart song in Italian. Joann performed a Mozart piano piece. After Sue led the other three classes in songs that she had taught them, while we just sat there, I got up and asked them if we could sing, too. (There I go again butting into other peoples' plans.) I led songs that all the children easily learned.

Sue's singing the Italian song, with her rather operatic voice, made me wonder again if I should play records of classical music as well as the more *folky* stuff I play. Generally, I don't like school music--too corny, too *goody-goody*. Yet the children love learning any songs. They don't care if they're corny. Most enthusiasm goes to Afro-American music, though--the kind Ella Jenkins sings. But maybe I'll play some recordings of classical music, too, next year.

Once, Barbara Buchan, an advisor from EDC, suggested that in order to make our pod of classrooms quieter, we play quiet classical music--Bach, Mozart--as a background to Project Time. We tried it, and it was added noise. It didn't help at all.

Today the children and I were very busy at Project Time. It was good busy-ness. It's been so interesting to see the change in the use of the blocks. I'm glad I let it happen. Building blocks had always been used in our large block corner. Colored blocks had always been used in this meeting space. But as the colored block structures have become increasingly intricate, more and more of the building blocks have been carried into the meeting space; first, the ramps, now, all sizes. I like to allow the children to keep their structures and to continue working on them the next day. That was fine when they built in the block corner, or when the colored block buildings were small. But this is impossible. We now have no meeting place and no thoroughfare. Maybe we should start meeting in 213, which is an empty classroom that Ginny and I share. I hate it because it has no walls and the children are easily distracted by people going through the team area, but it's a possibility....

June 15. There was no picnic. It rained all Sunday morning. We were all so disappointed. We'll try again next Saturday.

I've started clearing the room in earnest, though it's so early to do so. I'm determined to walk out of school on Friday, June 26, with nothing more to do; then to be able to sit around the following Monday when we must return.

I'm trying to keep the children working while I put away more than I ever did in years past, before the children left. I'm very angry that this year, because of the strike, we got no preparation days before the children arrived (we usually have two) and none after they leave (we usually have one).

I'm putting things away during Project and Sustained Reading Times and it gives me a wonderful chance to stand back and just watch the kids at work, intervening only if things get too loud or rough. I should probably do it more often.

All morning Anita, Atiya, Sally, and Pam were talking about how they are going to surprise me on the last day of school. They kept whispering loudly and shushing one another when I got near them. As they talked, they were drawing crayon pictures on 12x18 manilla paper. At the end of Project Time, they gave them to me. The girls had written, "I love Mrs. Strieb and my Mom;" or "Mrs. Strieb is nice;" etc.

June 16. Slim and Jo, Deborah's parents, visited our class to talk about their work. Jo teaches in a nursery school. The children guessed correctly. (All their guesses were sex-stereotyped: nurse's aide, nurse, homemaker, secretary, teacher.)

I asked the children to try to guess Slim's occupation by asking him yes or no questions. They didn't understand. Leonard asked, "Do you know how to do short things like Maria's mother?" He meant shorthand. Slim is a community organizer. He had to be brief because the children were very restless.

Rather than have writing time, I gave the children a choice. "Those people who would like to continue their writing should get it. Those who worked with Lego yesterday may continue to do that." It went so well....

June 18. We had a surprise visitor in the schoolyard yesterday. Felicia's Uncle Mark, who had led a workshop on mural painting at the Advisory Center years ago, brought her to school. Of course I asked him to come back to talk to the children about his work. Mark, who organizes mural projects, explained not only his work as an artist, but also what a mural is. The children asked questions and then he described his last mural, which was a shadow picture. The children remembered that their kindergarten teachers had done silhouettes of their heads

as a Christmas gift. Mark urged the children to look for murals on walls as they travel around the city.

Thalia took a day off from work to help put things away. She *really* worked. She also came to help us celebrate her sister Bobbie's birthday. Bobbie started out as a Parent Scholar (someone who is given a grant to work in the classroom for ten weeks). Bobbie so loved working in Ginny's room that she continued as a volunteer for the rest of the year. She has also helped Dorothy and me. So we all decided to give her a surprise birthday party. I told Thalia, and she brought Bobbie's son. We combined the three classes and it was crowded, but fun. We ate cake, jello, and punch; the children sang songs, made speeches, and gave Bobbie some cards they had made. I think she enjoyed it.

Bobbie's son, who is in a special class at another school, and who sometimes causes behavior problems there, fit into our class perfectly. He loved the animals and carried the guinea pig around all day. The children were a little puzzled by his behavior, but when they saw my acceptance they were fine.

In the morning my oldest son, Lee, visited. I had told the children he might come, and described him. "He's very tall and he has an Afro. Do you know what an 'Afro' is?" The children said that William and Reggie have one; Bobbie overheard and said that she has one. I said that an Afro is sometimes called a bush. Belinda looked shocked. "Is your son white or black?" she asked.

When Lee arrived the girls swooned and everyone giggled. He told them what Kelly School used to be like when he went here. He answered their questions. Then I told them that Lee can speak not only English, but also Hebrew and German. They said sentences and he translated into both languages. He wrote color words on the board in both Hebrew and German. I told the children to watch as he wrote Hebrew because it would look as if he were writing backwards. He wrote some sentences in Hebrew, translating from the children's English dictation.

My second son, Saul, who is sixteen, visited in the afternoon and told the children stories about his days in the school.

Felicia, Diana, Jill, Maria, and Susan worked in the block corner today and, for the first time in a while, a decent structure was built. (By that I mean that blocks weren't scattered here and there, and there was some order.) They had built a city.

June 19. At a time when we should be doing lots together as a class, enjoying the last few days of our year together, my mind is elsewhere. I'm thinking about records, report cards, putting things away, and deadlines. In some school districts, teachers don't do records until school is over for the children and they're given three days at the end of the year. They mail report cards to the students.

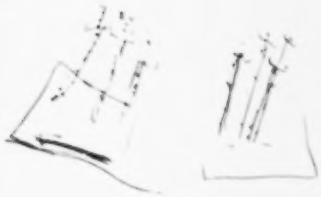
That's not to say that I feel that the children aren't learning anything, or at least integrating what they've learned. But this could be such a full, satisfying time of year for us, and it's not. They believe that they're *just playing* and they meet that belief with mixed feelings: *It's fun, but it's not school.*

June 20. In spite of threats of rain all day, and at least one shower, we had our picnic at Fern Hill Park. (It's a large neighborhood park where we take the children in the fall and spring.) I think Saturday is a hard day for people, and many who planned to be at the picnic last Sunday were not there. I met Mark and David and their families at 11 and sent the children to post signs to mark the trail. Mark's mom, Jean, and I hung the big banner and the pictures on the clothesline. By noon other families had arrived, and by the end 17 families had participated.

I enjoyed just being with everyone with no responsibilities. My son, Max, and Henry's dad organized some touch football. Some kids skated, rode bikes, and played on the nearby playground equipment. At about 4:30, after clean-up--"Every child must pick up 25 pieces of trash" --we went home. Donald, Mark's dad, said, "If you have this class next year, let's have a picnic in the Fall, too."

June 22. I went into the Principal's office to remind him that the children had sent comments to him about Play Day, and that I hoped he would respond to them in some way. He is so convinced that this was the best kind of Play Day possible--"We had 99 percent participation" --that he really didn't pay attention to most of the children's suggestions. Out of about 20 letters from my class, only two said it was long enough. The rest wished it had been longer, but he focused on those two.

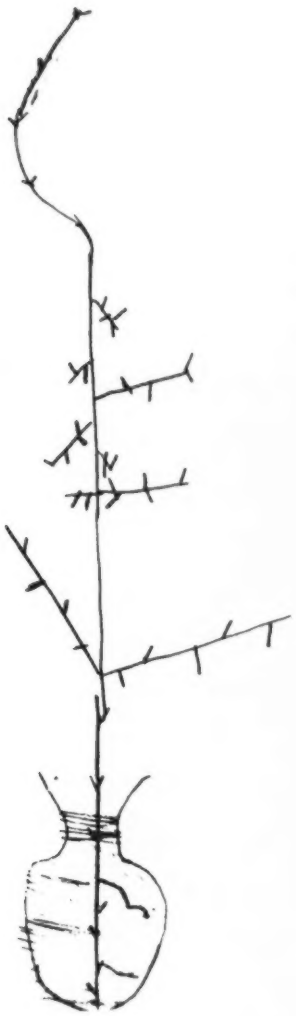
He then wrote a very adult letter to these first graders. Could he have forgotten that they're in first grade?



We visited the trees for the last time this year. It was really hot out: *The trunk of the magnolia has a split; so does one of the heavier branches....The leaves are light and dark green....The light green leaves are closer to the sun; the darker ones are underneath the others....There are still some buds that didn't open.*

Mark noticed some letters carved on one of the branches: "How could anyone write letters so far out on that branch? It's not strong enough to hold anyone." Then everyone's attention was diverted to finding the letters Mark had seen. I had trouble finding them. We walked around the tree and saw more letters carved on the same branch. We'd never noticed them before.

The maple leaves are much darker green than they used to be. The ivy is growing on the trunk and on two branches. The wind began to blow and we watched the way



the leaves and branches moved. I suggested that those who wanted to could sway their bodies like the tree--over, down, and around; over, down, and around. (We'd done this in the fall.) Then I said, "Shhhh, listen to the sound as the wind moves the leaves around. Be quiet." Then, "What sound does it make? Can you make that sound?" It was very calming to watch the tree being moved by the wind.

The beech tree's dense leaves hide the branches. I asked the children to move into the shade of the tree. For the third time we talked about what makes a shadow. They know that you need light, but it's hard for them to think of the object (tree) as being in between. Between the sun and what? I'd like to do much more with light and shadows next year. Inspired by the Elementary Science Study's *Guide to Light and Shadow*, I once did some tracing around shadows on the ground with chalk, and playing shadow tag. But I haven't done it recently.

The children again noticed the difference in color between the outer leaves of the tree (purple) and the inner ones (brownish-reddish-green). The red veins on the leaves were still prominent.

The fruit or nuts on the tree are becoming bright red. Lots of nuts had fallen to the ground and the children gathered them. Once again the display table (which I'm trying to clean, along with the rest of the classroom) is filled with found objects, and now the children want to bring branches inside and draw them.

I said I was sad to be saying goodbye, and that the children should try to visit the trees during the summer. "And we've never seen it at night, nor have we been under it in the rain. Try to get your parents to bring you then." Diana said, "I saw it at night when we saw the school play. The tree was black then."

It's too bad things are so rushed now. This whole experience needs more review and thought with the kids. I hope there will be time during the next few days to make some plans with them about trees for next year, when they will return to my class for second grade. I have a few ideas:

Photographing the trees in all seasons. Drawing the trees. Having each child keep a tree journal. Choosing three different trees next year. Not being so formal (a hard one for me, since I feel that the group experience was a good one, which should continue). Read poems about trees. Write some tree poems. Choose an evergreen tree.

Matthew and Douglas, from 212, second grade, asked permission to perform for my class. We listened solemnly as Matthew played the violin and Douglas played the plastic clarinet. ("It is too a real instrument!") They played the inevitable "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." The children loved it and gave them the respect they deserved. I asked Doug to sing, and he sang a song from Cinderella. He has such a beautiful, sweet voice.

One-by-one I called the children to the drawer shelf, and together we cleaned out their drawers. Books, workbooks, work that I needed for my files, and trash were removed. Everything that needs to go home was returned to the drawers.

June 23. We were out of the room all day today, and it was wonderful. The weather was cool, sunny, dry--quite a change from our past humid days. Of course, I feel terribly pressed to get everything done. Today we got next year's class list, and I have the same group, including Foster and Nina, who were retained. I wanted them, and I'm pleased. With lay-offs and cuts this might be changed next year, but I'll not worry about it.

First we went to the Germantown Friend's Free Library. I don't know why I chose a private library over the public library. We should have visited both this spring. I guess I feel that the Friend's Library is closer *and* cozier.

The librarian read a book to the kids, first asking, "Do you have a favorite story?" I can't remember the answers, but it's a great question I must remember to ask often.

The children were allowed to do some "Free Reading." I loved watching the different approaches to the freedom in a new setting.

Ali became completely engrossed in his book, not looking up until he'd finished it. Paul was so worried that someone else would have a more interesting book or magazine than he, that he changed his choice every minute, never looking at what he had. Mrs. Eigelbrot, the librarian, said, "Who's that? He certainly has a short attention span." Robbie did the same. Leonard, Lloyd, and Zachary won the race to *The Empire Strikes Back Storybook* and had to fend off seven other kids as they tried to read the pictures. Susan and Pam asked for Fairy Tales and Atiya became angry because Susan had the one she wanted. David asked to read the book that had just been read to the class. The rest read quietly and calmly, changing books when they wished. I was pleased with their independence and concentration.

Then we went to the Rose's house, which is right down the street from the library. Everyone brought her or his own lunch. We carried milk from school for those who had brought nothing to drink. After a quiet lunch on the grass under the pear tree, the kids played wiffleball or kickball; climbed on the swing, slide, or climber; or just ran around. We harvested the garden and sat in a circle on the grass, quietly eating our salad. As we ate we played the Paper Bag Guessing Game. It was Kristina's Box Turtle. We played "Duck, Duck, Goose" and then celebrated the June birthdays with a Birthday Watermelon. It was really a lovely day.

Usually I like to give a little lesson on the salad, pointing out to the children that we were eating leaves (lettuce), roots (radishes), and fruits (peas), but it

would have been impossible to keep their attention outside, especially with Sammy and Millie running around....

June 24. Thanks to Bobbie, Maria's aunt, all the filing and records are finished. I don't know what I'd do without her.

Linda, Atiya's mother, was in to get her daughter's report card and to talk about Atiya. I told her briefly about the difficulty Atiya has completing her work. If she sits near other children, she talks. If I seat her by herself she either sucks her thumb or daydreams. "I'm concerned because I don't know exactly what to do. I know she can't help sucking her thumb, but it really distracts her. She's an intelligent child, but is not getting any of the practice she needs--at reading, writing, or math. I'll see what happens at the beginning of next year, and if it continues we might have to change classes. Perhaps this class is too distracting for her." I'm not sure I really believe this, and I hate to admit that my class is not a good one for such a child, but I wanted to be as straightforward with Linda as possible. I promised to talk with her again at the beginning of next year.

Bobbie made peanut butter fudge with some kids, and we celebrated the summer birthdays today. It's really important to me to remember children who were born during the summer.

I spent some time writing a final newsletter for the parents. I tried to outline most of the things we've done this year and I made suggestions for summer activities. I feel it's a good newsletter.

I think Lloyd tried to steal Isaac's Batmobile. He hid it in a desk, but we found it. I didn't make a big deal out of it.

I took an old, decayed sandbox over to the Teacher's Center, where I'll try to repair it this summer. I need to tear out all the rusted metal, build a new bottom and lining, and seal it with polyurethane. Peggy did it once. Now the sandbox would cost about $250.

Robbie's dad, Rob, visited our class to talk about his work repairing trailers and trucks. It was one of the most exciting visits we've had because he'd planned so carefully for it. (It's a lesson for me.)

First he held up some hand tools and he asked the children to guess how they are used. There was lots of wonderful discussion and many anecdotes from the children. I asked, "Does your mother use tools?" The children described the things their mothers fix around the house and which tools they used. "I think it's as important for girls to know how to use tools as it is for boys to know how to sew. Everyone needs to know both."

The next group of tools Rob showed were power tools. Again, he asked how they are used. He talked about safety and said, "To practice safety on the job you must remember two things: wear your goggles when you work (he put his on), and pull out the plug when you're finished and put the tool down." Belinda asked if he was wearing his uniform. Rob said, "Yes, and there are different uniforms for different jobs."

Earlier in the year, Rob had given us some large sticker-signs. He read the words on them (dangerous explosives, poison gas, etc.) and explained how and why each is used. "Next time you're riding anywhere, look for the signs on the trailers. You'll know what they mean."

The children were deeply involved in the discussion and I know part of it is because they love tools. I asked Rob if he'd help me set up a woodworking area. The children cheered when they overheard us. Rob also got permission from his boss to park a truck and trailer in front of the school and let the kids explore it.

I'm *so* tired. I was up until 2:30. I'll be in terrible shape tomorrow. I wanted to give every parent who helped in the room in any way a small gift. To buy anything would have been both too expensive and too impersonal. So I baked two kinds of cookies that my mother taught me to make, wrapped them in fancy paper, and attached a personal note to each package. When I'd finished, there were only four families who had not helped in some way. I wrapped some cookies for each of them and wrote: "Dear _____, I've enjoyed your child. Warmly, Lynne Strieb."

It took much longer than I thought it would.

June 25. I asked the children, "Think about what we did this year. What did you like? What have you learned?" They mentioned cooking, the visits and help from their parents, the walks and trips, various Project Time activities, and reading and arithmetic.

I asked, "What changes should I make next year?" (I had to stop to tell the children I wasn't just talking about furniture changes.) *Put desks in rows....Change our drawers. Take all the toys out of the closet....Put sand in the block corner....Put the desks in rows. Give children a big cake on their birthdays....Let us use tools....Teach us to learn spelling better....Make lunchtime longer....Let us make a haunted house....Make another Gingerbread house....Change the desks....Let us play Monopoly....Teach us to crochet....Give us a longer Play Day....Change around the drawers and display table.... Get more blocks....Read us more fairy tales....Teach us how to sew clothes.*

I'd also hoped to ask if there were things they'd like to learn about, but there was no time. I'll have to do it on the first day of school, whenever *that* might be. There is a strong possibility of a strike.

I wanted to record some thoughts about several children and reading. Foster is still plodding through *Go Dog, Go*. He works by himself or with Lloyd or Nina, and asks me for words he can't remember. He forgets often, but no matter. I'm lending him a copy of this book for the summer.

Lloyd's lack of progress still disturbs me. He loves books and reads the pictures with many fine readers. Occasionally he will try an Easy Reader. I think next year he'll be ready to work more with a partner. He's paying a little more attention, and has been participating much more in class discussions. Now that I think of it, his concentration and accurate, sensible answers have surprised and pleased me recently.

Sally still gets nervous when she reads with me, but she's reading. She loves writing. She still needs contact with me, and I need to protect her from her bad feelings because in reading she can't keep up with her friends.

Jane either works with Foster or Belinda or by herself, often re-reading the first few books of the Bank Street Series. She still does poorly at sounding out words.

I've finished typing the children's writing. I don't know if I can keep this up year after year. But parents do love to receive the typed copies of the writing and I learn a lot from seeing all of it in one place.

Jimmy asked me for some *hard work* to do over the summer. I gave him an old second-grade math workbook, which he'll breeze through. I told him to join a book club, too.

June 26. This is the last day with the children. Ben handed me a small package and said, "Here, my mom gave this to you." He tried to get away from me as fast as he could. I said, "Just your mom?" "Well, me and my mom." "Is it all right if I show it to the class?" "Okay."

There was a lovely prism inside the package and I asked the children what it is. William thought it was a diamond. I told them it was a prism and Mark said it makes a rainbow. I explained in the best way I could how a prism works. William warned me that someone might steal it.

We talked a lot about the storm yesterday evening. Many children saw a rainbow in the sky and told where they were when they saw it. Jane said, "I looked outside and the sky was all orange." Mark wanted to know if anyone had seen a leprechaun and explained what that is.

Atiya's mother had been sitting in the room, listening to the discussion. She added her story about seeing the rainbow from the window of the hospital where she works. She talked of how filled with awe she was, and how much seeing something like that or a big storm makes her feel tremendous respect for nature. I don't know if

the children understood her words, but I'm sure they understood the feeling.

Linda talked about her work. I asked the children to guess what she does, since she was wearing her uniform. *Do you operate?....Check teeth?....Work in an emergency room?....Give shots?....Are you a nurse or nurse's aide?* Linda described her work as a unit or ward or medical clerk.

Linda was also in because she's terribly upset about both Atiya's and Crystal's CAT scores. Atiya definitely did not pay attention when she took it. "They use these tests to place children. I don't like it," she said. "I don't trust them." I never know what to say except that the tests mean nothing to me.

During the morning, we completely cleaned the room, moving all the tri-wall shelves to the tops of tables, stacking chairs, washing tables, and dusting shelves.

Just as I had on the first day of school and several times through the year, I asked the children, "What do you see? What has changed? What is different in the room?" It was our final group discussion.

We had our Teachers' Learning Cooperative meeting at Edie's. We'd planned to swim, but it was cloudy and cool, so we sat around, reminisced about the year, and drank some wine. We needed to just sit and unwind. We also watched the movie of Leslie Stein's classroom, *We All Know Why We're Here*, which we now own.

Marge Minor called me today. She and I met on the train last week and began to talk about teaching. She'd felt she'd never really mastered classroom discipline though she could finally admit to herself that she'd had really good ideas for teaching. But she left teaching about five years ago.

She talked a little about her son who had had some problems in public school. Now he's at The School in Rose Valley, and is very happy. I told her about Grace Rotzel's book, which I'd read, and what a nice place it must be.

When Marge called today she said that the Principal of Rose Valley will be leaving after this year and she thought of me for the job. "If you were a principal, you wouldn't have to worry about screaming any more." I told her how flattered I was that she'd thought of me, but that I really am not interested in leaving the classroom. I asked if I could mention the opening at the Teachers' Learning Cooperative meeting, which I did.

June 27. It's hard to unwind and let go of school. I was thinking about the beautiful drawings that the children made of the dogwood and the roses, particularly David's rose. He observed it and copied it from life, but the feeling in it is extraordinary. Does such a picture show a relationship between art and science? Is this the sort of thing Pat Carini is talking about when she says, "Art leads the way?"

I went to a party around the corner, and who should be there but Leonard and his parents, and Ben and his parents. Ben wouldn't look at me. Leonard tried to pinch me with little crab claws. He's so devilish looking and adorable.

I talked for a long time with Ben's, then Leonard's, then Takuma's parents about their kids. (I'd had Takuma in second grade.)

Ned, Rita, and Kate got lay-off notices today. That's three-fourths of the Rainbow Team. How does the city expect to keep interested parents in the public schools when they can't depend on the continuity they thought they'd have when they began.

July 1. School's been closed for five days and I got a call from Joann, Edward's mother. She was looking at the test scores and was quite upset because his score in Comprehension was so low. I first made sure that was the only score she was upset about, then said, "When Edward took the test, he was able to read, but not fluently. He was reading word by word. During the test, when he came to a word he didn't know, he kept trying to figure it out instead of going on. This is very common. It's happened before to very bright children. If he had taken the test a month later, this probably would not have happened. That's why I feel this test is meaningless. Both you and I know he can read. Why do we need this test? It doesn't tell us anything about his reading."

July 2. I took *Go Dog, Go!* to Foster. He's leaving for his trip South tomorrow. His dad said, "He'll be asking us for words all the way there."

July 20. Ted Chittenden and Marianne Amarel from ETS are doing a study of how teachers make decisions regarding reading instruction. They interviewed four classroom teachers, including me, the reading teacher, and the Principal from our school.

They asked me to describe my reading program. Although I organized my reading program in this way before reading about it, I used the Pennsylvania State Comprehensive Reading Program as an outline for the description: writing, sustained reading, formal reading instruction, and responding to literature.

They asked about the help that books, other teachers, tests, parents, etc., give me. When I started teaching reading, I used teacher's guides from the program required in our school. I don't use them any longer, but I learned a lot from them. They gave me a starting point and some continuity.

Later, Ted asked if the criterion-referenced tests that we are supposed to give the children help me. I said, "They don't help at all. In fact, I don't even give them, but don't tell anyone...."

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